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GLORY IN THE GRAVE

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GLORY IN THE GRAVE

A Series of
Scripture Studies on

The Resurrections in The New Testament

BY

The REV. J. J. KNAP
of Groningen, The Netherlands

Translated from the Holland by
The REV. K. BERGSMA
of Denver, Colo.

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GLORY IN THE GRAVE

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

IN this book we have a series of Sunday evening discourses on the resurrections recorded in the New Testament. They were delivered by the Rev. J. J. Knap, Czn., of Groningen, The Netherlands.

The Dutch title is: "Licht in de Graven." The Rev. Knap gives a thorough, Scriptural study of those portions of the Bible that he discusses. I have noticed three distinct qualities in all the sermons here given. First of all they contain a fine and clear explanation of the text. Rev. Knap uses the analytical method, so that each sentence is elucidated. Then he sets the text in question in the light of Scripture as a whole. And thirdly, he gives a personal application of each verse. What gave me the most pleasure in translating these discourses was the mysticism that pervades them. They are tinged with feeling, and give an unusual insight into the spiritual reactions of God's people. We have here a style of sermon that is not prevalent in America to-day, but which would be a large blessing. On each page we find the power of the Word of God.

I have eliminated some distinctly Dutch allusions which the ordinary reader would not grasp because of lack of acquaintance with conditions in the Netherlands. Occasionally I have given a very literal translation because some doctrinal point would be involved.

These discourses are written in the plain language of every day. All theological nomenclature has been avoided by both author and translator.

K. BERGSMA.

CHRIST IN GLORY

I.

THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA

> And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.
> —Rev. 9:11.

A SERIES of Bible studies that will cover the resurrections recorded in the New Testament needs an introduction that places Jesus Christ before our minds in all his resurrection glory, as the One who is alive forevermore. For it is by His power that the dead have been recalled from the grave, whether He wrought the miracle in His own person, or used His apostles as instruments in His hand, and enabled them to work a resurrection miracle.

That is the reason why we will begin the series with a study of the verses which we have just read from the first chapter of the last book of the Bible. This chapter describes the appearance of the glorified Christ to the apostle John on the island Patmos. For this service we will limit ourselves to that which John *hears;* later we will discourse on the things he *sees,* and then there will follow a discourse on the *impression* which the vision made on the Seer himself.

The verses which we will now consider find their context in the paragraph immediately pre-

ceding. There we find that John names this last book of the Bible with the name by which it is still known among us: "the Revelation of Jesus Christ." Though ws usually speak of the Revelation of Saint John, we simply mean with that term that John received this revelation. The Revelation itself is from Jesus Christ. In this enigmatical book He has shown to John, and through him to all His servants, the things which must shortly come to pass. Christ has not so much declared these future events, but has rather revealed them in pictures and visions. John sees a series of visions pass before his mind's eye. Afterwards he wrote them in a book and this book he dedicates to the seven churches which are in Asia, churches to which we will soon refer again.

As we open our congregational meetings with an invocation, so the apostle writes at the beginning of his book the unusually beautiful invocation: "Grace be unto you, and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven spirits which are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first begotten from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

After giving this glorious greeting John announces as the main subject of his book the com-

ing of Christ on the clouds of heaven. Every eye shall see Him, they also who pierced Him, and all the kindreds of the earth shall mourn over Him. The coming of Christ will be the cope-stone of all history, for He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is, as God the Father, the One who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty, clothed with all power in heaven and on earth.

This is the Christ who in this vision is walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. The verses of our text do not yet describe the appearance of Christ Himself, but tell us to *whom, through whom* and *for whom* this revelation is given, and this is already a rich source of comfort. Our theme is—

The Revelation of The Alpha and The Omega.

The first verse of our text answers the question *to whom* the revelation of the glorified Christ was given. The name of the apostle is definitely mentioned at the very beginning of this verse and in the same verse we find a part of his life's history. "I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."

The apostle was the only one of the twelve that remained. The others had died or had fallen by the hand of the executioner. John must have been very aged when he proclaimed the Word of God in

the great city of Ephesus, and as a faithful witness of Jesus Christ was not ashamed of the gospel of the cross. And now, behold, at the end of his life a persecution broke out against the Christians, while emporer Domitian sat on the throne of Rome and ruled the world. No one among the Christians was spared by the enemies. They did not even spare the grey-headed John. Jesus had at one time asked him and his brother, when he referred to His own baptism by blood: "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Not without presumption the sons of thunder had answered: "We are able!" And now the hour is come in which John must keep his word, for he is exiled to the island Patmos for the testimony of Christ.

Patmos was not a barren rock, as many think, but a rocky island approximately nine miles long and three miles wide, washed by the waves of the Aegean sea, having mountains that in some places reach the height of three hundred meters. It was a lonely place, however. John was a castaway for the sake of his faith. But though forsaken of men, the Lord visits him in marvelous revelations. The grey-headed exile receives a blessing with which he has comforted a posterity of thousands.

The Lord ever restores our soul.

Whosoever languishes in a lonely Patmos for His Name's sake, finds an open heaven above him. He receives a deeper vision into the heart of God

than the man who may preach in a busy city to a throng of thousands that listen with rapt attention, ... indeed, it is not wretched, but blessed, to be persecuted for righteousness' sake.

* * *

"I John, ... your brother," we read.

How modestly the great apostle introduces himself.

"I, John, the apostle of the Lord!" . . . . No, he does not say that; he cannot say that, for when the King appears in Person, as the Christ now does, the ambassador is overshadowed by His glory. He therefore is silent about his official dignity, and simply calls himself a "brother" of the faithful. "I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ."

He is a companion of the believers in a threefold way:

In the tribulation that causes them to sigh.

In the kingdom of glory, that shall come with the consummation of all things.

In the patience or steadfastness to bear all things; to endure, and to suffer, knowing that this is the way into the Kingdom.

O, if we would but write these three words in this consecutive order in our daily lives, we would not be discouraged when we suffer shame for the sake of our faith. In our day we need not lay our heads upon the block. That kind of persecution is

past, though it will come again in unheard of bitterness toward the end of the world. But though we need not seal our testimony with our blood, we must yet bear with being ignored, and be exiled from the circles of cultured people, and sometimes endure contumely and scorn, because we live as bold witnesses of Jesus Christ, and do not want to hide our faith.

How will you endure this light affliction in patience, so that your faith does not falter, though you are silent as a sheep before its shearers? There is but one way to be true, and to remain steadfast to the end: write next to the little word "tribulation" the great word "Kingdom." Look beyond the tribulation to the Kingdom of eternal joy that is set before you, and which now sends its beams of light upon your path.

To be a companion in tribulation for the sake of Jesus means that you will be a companion in the everlasting Kingdom. Persecuted for righteousness' sake, you are kings in hope. Not as though the Kingdom will be yours because of YOUR suffering. Christ has acquired and opened it by HIS suffering. His painful path went through suffering to glory, from the cross to the throne, and the disciple is not greater than his Lord. Bear then your little cross as kings: with kingly mind, with kingly dignity, with kingly majesty. Whoever is conscious of being a king by grace, will not yammer as a slave beneath the whiplashes of a hostile world, for in his heart

there are three words that follow each other in consecutive order; they are, tribulation, kingship, and then also: patience!

* * *

Let us now note *through whom* this revelation is given.

The answer is, through no one less than our living Lord Christ Himself.

John is in the spirit on the Lord's day. He does not mean the last day, as if he in spirit were transferred to Judgment day. He refers to the first day of the week, the day in which Christ rose from the dead. This resurrection to a new, eternal life was a prophecy that one day all things would become new. The memorial day of the resurrection of Jesus was therefore especially fitting to reveal to John that new order of things of which this last book of the Bible prophesies when it pictures the New Jerusalem.

On that day John was "in the spirit," elevated above the limits of space and time, and translated by the Spirit of the Lord into a state of ecstacy, in which he was consciously awake, so that he heard and saw all things plainly.

Suddenly he hears behind him the rumble of a mighty voice, which sounded like a trumpet call. The trumpet would sometimes be used to call the people in assembly. John is therefore very attentive, and is ready to listen reverently to the heavenly voice. It is the voice of Christ in glory: "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last."

This is a majestic name for Jesus Christ. There are some manuscripts that do not have this title in this verse, as we can see from the American Revised Version, which has omitted these words. But they are found elsewhere in this chapter, and because they express a blessed truth, we follow the Authorized Version and take them up for exposition.

The Alpha is the first and the Omega the last letter of the Greek alphabet, as is shown by the additional words: "the first and the last," while Jesus is elsewhere called "the beginning and the end." All these expressions portray Christ to you in his comprehensive greatness. He did not come into being when he was born in Bethlehem; John has already written of Him in his gospel as the Word that was with God and was God; who had made all things, and without whom nothing was made that was created. He is therefore at the beginning of the world's history as the Alpha or the First. And he also stands at the end of the world's history, for He shall come on the last day to judge the world,—therefore He is the Omega or the Last. He controls all that ever was, that now is, and afterwards shall be. As the Son of God He holds everything in the grasp of His hand, and directs everything to its purpose and goal. You might say: the universe is under his command; whatever His love desires to accomplish, His power enables Him to do.

In our language we do not speak of Alpha and Omega, but of A and Z.

If Christ is the first and last letter, then he controls all the letters that lie between, and therefore controls everything that ever has been written, and ever shall be written. What are we not able to write with our twenty-six little letters? With nothing but this handful of signs the scientists write their scientific works, the poets their poetry, the statesmen their laws, the business men their mercantile letters, the men of industry their contracts, and the diplomats their secret treaties. With this handful of letters a mother writes a touching letter to her child, and the penitent confesses his guilt. With these same letters you pray to your God, and sing psalms to the praise of His Name. In a word, whatever happens, and thus becomes history in the life of human kind and in your own little life, ... it is all comprehended between that A and that Z. According to God's counsel everything is enfolded, is managed, and is guided by the Alpha and the Omega, Jesus Christ. You will never be the plaything of fate or chance, for Jesus Christ has the most minute events in his hand; even the hairs of your head are numbered.

That thought brings quiet confidence.

But you are not to think of the external events in your life only. Jesus Christ is also the Alpha and the Omega of your spiritual life, for from beginning to end this is of him, and you have wrought nothing whatsoever of this new life. He

was the Alpha of your soul because your first feeling of trouble over your sin; your first tears of sorrow over your guilt and pollution; your first heartfelt confession of sin; your first childlike prayer for grace, and your first whisper of the blessed name of Jesus was of Him, and of Him alone.

So shall he also be the Omega of the work of salvation in your heart. Fear not, He will not forsake the work of His own hands. Throughout your whole life He will guide you through all dangers. And though you may sometimes think that you will never be an heir of the salvation of heaven, O, Beloved! believe Christ rather than your heart. He assures you that He is also the Omega or the Last. Let that be a pledge to you that He will perfect the good work He has begun in you. You must go through the whole alphabet, but with the gracious help of your Lord you will struggle through in prayer. And whatever men may say, the last letter of your life will not be death and the dark grave, but the living Omega, the living Christ, who leads you into the Kingdom where there are prepared for you the white robe of victory, the palm branches of eternal joy, and the crown, the diadem of righteousness and life!

* * *

And FOR WHOM is this revelation given?

It was not only the purpose of our Lord to strengthen and encourage John in his tribulation

on the isle of Patmos, though the apostle needed Christ's comfort. It was the purpose of the glorified Christ to reach a large circle of believers. He desired to make known to all his disciples that which he was now to reveal to John. They must be acquainted with the complete contents of this last book of the Bible. Our Lord has also given this portion of Holy Writ to His church to read and to study, even though it may be hard to grasp. And therefore He says to His apostle, who is still in the spirit: "What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea."

These seven churches, which actually existed at that time, are representative of all Christendom. The number seven is in Scripture the holy number of fulness and completeness. It is formed of three and four, together making seven. The number three refers to the Triune God, and the number four to the world in its fulness, from the four points of the compass. The number seven therefore tells us that God is with His churches, which are established in all parts of the world. These churches are not alike in all respects. But they are all built on the same foundation. For Christ has said that He would build His church on the stone of Peter's confession, that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. In that confession lies the unity of the churches. But with this

unity there is a certain variety. Every one of the churches mentioned here is of an individual type, and has special characteristics and failings. Thus there are any number of variations in the one, holy, catholic, Christian Church, but these differences never reach the foundation, which ever imparts its firmness to this building of God, as it is being extended to the ends of the earth.

Try to keep these seven names in your memory.

For you appreciate, do you not, that our Lord spoke these names to John? And you are not thinking, are you, that these names can add but little to your edification? This list of names embodies a glorious thought. Christ, who has purchased the church with His blood, does not look upon the church as a great multitude of souls, as an impersonal mass of men. No, he individualizes, He knows His churches by name. When He brings such a name to His mind He sees that church before Him with all its peculiar needs, its trials, and its sins, and He is prepared to give it the special grace which that church and no other needs at that moment.

In this seemingly dry list of names Christ reveals His love.

Love is never satisfied with generalities.

Love is always personal and shuns anonymity.

You know this in regard to yourself. You are not satisfied when you read in your Bible that God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, or that Christ loves sinners. But when this

faithful Shepherd tells you that He knows His sheep by name; when the Lord assures you that He calls you by name and has written your name in the palms of His hands, then you no longer speak of a dry list of names, but you find in the mention of the name a most personal love, which opens your whole heart for your Saviour.

It greatly comforts us to be assured: Jesus knows my name, He has written it on His heart, and He shall not only remember me in all my trouble and pain, but also in my anxieties and cares. It is indeed true that in the instances which we have in the Bible, He does not always mention the names of His dear ones in the same loving way, and He still distinguishes among His saints. There is a vast difference when he says, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" or "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful," than when he mentions the name of a weeping woman whose whole soul was attached to Him, and says in love Divine: "Mary!" so that she at once answers in adoration, "Rabboni!"

Will you now believe this? He will call you by name also, though the sound of His voice is no longer heard on earth. But then He must have become everything to you, your Alpha and Omega. You probably say that he *is* this, ... but not always. Sometimes days and weeks pass by while you sit in darkness and do not see the light of

Christ shine, nor feel His grace in your soul. These are blank pages in your book of life. Probably written full with the things of this life, but empty of the heavenly things. Brethren, we are too little "in the spirit," even though we use this phrase in a more common way than it is used of John. We are not elevated enough above the things that are visible and temporal. We must allow ourselves to be lifted up by the Spirit above the turmoil of the world, to cling to the heart of Christ.

Pray for that grace, and pray with confession of sin.

The answer that the Lord gives to that prayer is usually painful for our flesh. He often deems it necessary to empty us of much to which we cling with our hearts, just as He sent John to the loneliness of Patmos, before He could translate him "into the spirit." Does He make life lonely round about you? Does He take from you much that is dear to you? He makes it all to turn out to your advantage. God takes, that He may give. In this respect also your increase in Christ involves a decrease of yourself.

In this way He becomes the First and the Last of each new day. If He is your Alpha in the morning, and your Omega in the evening, then all that lies between will be for your good. He dictates. Life's experience writes. Sometimes it writes joy, then again sorrow. But why should you complain? Even the writing of the darkest day is between

two gleaming lights, the flaming Alpha at the beginning, and the flaming Omega at the end. Christ is the First and the Last of each day. And if He is the Last One in your present llfe, then will He again be the First One in eternity.

AMEN

II

THE SEVEN CANDLESTICKS

Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabiters of the earth, and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man-child.

And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood, after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.

And the earth helped the woman; and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

—Rev. 12:12-16.

THE apostle John had been exiled to the lonely island Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Among the many visions which he received there on the first day of the week when he was "in the spirit," the vision of the glorified Christ in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks takes a spe-

cial place. This vision is as it were an introduction to the whole book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is a book full of judgments, but all its horrors, and all its woes are enclosed between a beginning of glory and an end of glory. In the first chapter you see the exalted Son of man, who has the keys of hell and death hanging from his golden girdle; and in the last chapter you behold the new Paradise with its crystal river bordered on both banks with the trees of life where the tree of life of the first Paradise has become a beautiful lane.

The tragedies of life are ever bordered on both sides with the glory of heaven, if we have but an open eye for that glory. By means of this first vision our Lord desired to strengthen John and the churches for the persecutions that were at hand. John was a most intimate friend of Jesus during our Lord's earthly ministry. He reclined at the breast of Jesus when they were celebrating the passover. He seemed to know the very heartbeat of our Saviour. In his evangel he writes concerning Christ: "We have beheld His glory, a glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." This was blessedly true. He had often seen in the wonders and signs of our Lord a gleam of His heavenly glory. He beheld this glory plainly when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, but he had never seen Jesus as He is described in the words of our text.

There is a marked difference, however. In the

verses of our text we do not have an appearance of Jesus in the sense in which He appeared on earth. Nor such an actual appearance as Paul saw on the way to Damascus. For the verses of our text contain a vision, in which everything is a symbol or emblem of heavenly glory. We read of brazen feet, white hair, and of a sword that proceeds from Jesus' mouth. This cannot be a photograph of the exalted Christ, but is a symbolical representation of heavenly truths which have been brought to us in earthly figures. They teach us who and what Christ is and will be for His saints.

We therefore have here a symbolical picture of the Christ in glory.

If we examine the verses of our text in the order in which they are found we first read of seven candlesticks surrounding the Christ; next, of the dignity with which he is clothed; and finally of the form in which He appears. Every detail is striking. We are not able to look upon his majestic glory without taking the words of an Isaiah as ours: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips!"

In this vision we see:

Christ in the Midst of the Seven Candlesticks

What constitutes the entourage of the glorified Christ in this vision with which the apostle on Patmos is comforted?

Seven golden candlesticks.

On that Lord's day John had just heard a great

voice as of a trumpet, which had given him the commission to write in a book all the things he was about to behold. This book is the last book of the Bible. And he must send it to the seven churches in Asia Minor.

The apostle very naturally turned about at the sound of that mighty voice, to see from whence it came. He then saw before him seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of the candlesticks One like unto the Son of man. John expresses himself very carefully in his description of this vision. He does not say briefly that it was the Son of man, but that it was a mysterious appearance, which resembled a son of man. This was his first impression, but subsequently it is plainly evident that this could be none other than Jesus, who now, however, was glorified.

The great voice had mentioned by name the seven churches to which John must send his book. He did not have to enquire therefore what the seven candlesticks meant; they pictured the seven churches which were representative of all Christendom, of all the true churches of all ages.

John was familiar with this figure. During the Old Testament dispensation the church in Israel was portrayed in the tabernacle by the golden candlestick whose six arms tapered upward in the form of a bow. Counting the arm in the center, which also had a cup of oil just as the other six, there would be seven lights standing in a straight line. This symbolized that Israel alone

enjoyed the full light of revelation and the knowledge of God in a world of darkness.

John does not now see, however, the seven-armed candlestick with its one straight line of light. Each light, each church, has now become independent and stands on its own feet. In the New Testament dispensation the individual churches or congregations have exchanged their mutual dependence for an independent life.

They form an impressive unity, however. The seven flames of light are independent lights, yet they are all gathered round about the Son of man. Jesus Christ has become the living Center of all the churches. All external bondage has been removed, but all the churches find their unity in a spiritual tie which binds them to Him who stands in their midst in glory.

Each congregation is therefore a candlestick, a golden candlestick.

This is a humble and humbling designation.

It is a humble name,—for the candlestick has no light of its own whatsoever. Its only purpose is to bear the light of Christ; to hold aloft *that* light in the world, just as a candlestick holds up *its* light, is the humble task of the Church of Christ. Not a single beam of light shines forth from the church itself. Christ must place the light of truth, the light of grace, and the light of holiness on that lightless candlestick, and at once a luminous flame is flickering in the darkness of the world.

This is also true of each member of the church personally. If you know yourself, you assent to the statement of Scripture that you are total darkness in yourself, but that Christ has lighted his light in you, and has thereby made you a burning candlestick. Let your light then shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven. Burn as a quiet flame in your own community. Let the truth of the Word of God beam forth in your conversation. Let the light of grace gleam in your daily conduct. In addition, something, at least, of the light of holiness must be seen in your life. And if the Lord gives you this grace, you will not boast about yourself, but you will cast aside all praise that you may receive with the testimony: "I am not the light. I but bear it. The light is of Christ!"

You are to be a candlestick, no, a golden candlestick.

Now you bow your head in shame!

Gold is the metal that pertains to God, the great King. In His city the streets are of pure gold, clear as crystal. O, what a measure of Divine grace must be given you, if something of that heavenly gold must be found in your life here on earth. Coarse iron, you say, is a more fitting figure of you than the noble, royal gold.

You are right.

But the magic wand of grace changes iron into gold. When the hand of God touches you, my brother, your life will be set on a higher plane;

you will gradually grow above the ignoble, the low, the mean, and the sinful. You dream golden dreams; you have golden ideals; you cherish golden expectations; you speak golden words of reconciliation and peace. Here on earth you have but the poor beginnings, but these poor beginnings are a prophecy of a perfection which you will gain in heaven. There you will be God's golden child!

* * *

With what *dignity* does Christ appear in this vision?

The answer to that question is partly given in the garment with which Christ is clothed as He is walking between the golden candlesticks. He is clothed with a long garment that reaches down to His feet, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. This is evidently an official robe. The word that is used in the original is used in Scripture both for the highpriestly robes and the robes of princes and kings.

The glorified Christ therefore appears here as Priest-King. During the Old Testament dispensation this twofold office might not be held by one man. One man was priest, but another was king. Before sin came into the world however, one person might have both offices, having even the prophetical office as well. This was the case with man in sinless paradise. Something of this dignity of sinless man was still to be seen in the mysterious Melchizedek, who was a priest of the most

high God, and also king of righteousness and peace.

Christ is priest after the order of Melchizedek, and not after the order of Aaron. Therefore he appears as Priest-King here, and also wears a girdle which reminds us of both offices. His girdle is not as those of the priests, ornamented with gold, but is of gold throughout, as is fitting for a king. And this girdle is not girt about his loins or hips, as was the case with the priests while serving at the altar, who would take up their long robes with their girdles, so that they would not interfere with their freedom of movement while serving. Christ's girdle is girt about the breasts, and the long robe flows down to the feet. It symbolizes rest and majesty. The service of reconciliation here on earth has been finished. The sacrifice has been given on Golgotha. And now the long, flowing robe, and the girdle about the breast testify to the blessed truth which Jesus spoke in that one word: "It is finished!"

A little further on John points out still another particularity.

Out of the mouth of the Son of man proceeds a sharp two-edged sword.

That is a symbol of the prophetic word of our Saviour, so that his prophetic dignity is added to his priestly and kingly. A two-edged sword has the form of a tongue, with which we speak or prophesy. Such a two-edged sword is used to wound and to slay. The word of the Lord wounds men,

sometimes turning on the godless to their destruction. But this sword also wounds to salvation. It slays your proud "I" in order that you may arise in Christ to a new life. It cleaves your heart, so that it lies open before your own eyes, and all its pollution is uncovered. Even after you have been converted, that sword comes again and again to cut off everything that is unholy in the sight of God. The Word of God is not a feathery plume that caresses, but a sword that wounds, and that mercilessly hews down your old sinful nature.

It is significant that this sharp, prophetic word is never separated from the Christ Himself. According to the original word, this sword always and continually proceeds from the mouth of Christ. He retains His Word in His own grasp. He fills that Word with His own presence. He uses that Word as a sword to pierce your heart.

Prophet, Priest and King,—such describes Christ in the fulness of his revelation.

The great Mediator is walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks of His church on earth. He guides the churches with His eye, and at the same time watches over the individual believers. Let that be your comfort. In your spiritual life you are not left to your own resources. There is One who cares for you, and preserves you with His grace. Does the flame of your love flicker low? The Priest stands ready to supply your lack of the oil of the Holy Spirit, and to raise the smoking

wick so that it becomes a bright burning flame spreading its light abroad.

Does Satan come with his temptations to make you doubt? The King stands ready to protect you, and to put to flight this archenemy of your soul with a single glance of his eye.

Does the world allure with its transient joys to make you depart from Christ and walk on the broad way of sin? The Prophet stands ready to flash His word as a two-edged sword before your eyes when He declares: "Whoever shall endure to the end, and he only, shall be saved!"

Trust in the help of this Prophet, Priest and King. In all your trials he stands ready to help. Were he not ever ready to watch over you, the flame of your faith would long have been quenched. But now you may hope to be to the very end what you have already become by his grace: a candlestick, a golden candlestick, crowned with a light that proclaims the glory of Jesus.

* * *

Finally the *form* in which Christ appears demands our consideration.

At a first glance John had simply noticed Jesus as one who was like unto a son of man. From a closer view he is able to give us the details of the appearance of Jesus Christ.

His head and His hair are white as wool, as white as snow. His eyes are as a flame of fire. His feet are like burnished brass, as if they were

burning in an oven. His brazen feet have a glow, therefore, as copper that is being melted. His voice, which first had sounded as a trumpet, was now as a voice of many waters. John knew by experience how the waters that washed the shores of Patmos could raise their voice in a mighty roar.

What John mentions about the seven stars in the right hand of Christ will be considered on another occasion. We have already spoken of the sword that went out of Christ's mouth. Mention must be made of one more detail: "And his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength!"

What an awe inspiring appearance!

When we read the seven letters which were sent to the seven churches, we find that each letter has a superscription. In each one of these superscriptions Christ describes himself with some of the details which are summed up for us in this paragraph. This keeps us from guessing at the meaning of the vision since we can arrive at its meaning by reading the seven letters. It is not necessary to mention this repeatedly. Let me rather ask you the personal question whether you know and honor Christ according to the perfections which are revealed to us in this vision.

Is he your Mediator with hair as white as snow? You know what it means to have your scarlet sins made white as snow, and white as wool, with His blood. The white hair of Jesus in like manner represents His spotless holiness. It also symbolizes profound wisdom, since this is

usually found with those whose heads have been whitened with age rather than with youth. When you contemplate this vision you realize that you can approach such a Christ only with an uncovered head. Indeed, you should bow before Him with bended knee.

You are wholly impure. Your heart is filled with folly, because it has no desire of its own accord after the ways of the Lord. But you need not remain far off from this glorified Christ. His holiness is the holiness of the Mediator who has washed away the sins of His people in His own blood. He will graciously impart to you His holiness. And if in your folly you do not know how to be delivered from your guilt and condemnation, then believe, O believe, that with Him there is Divine wisdom to help the most foolish and hopeless sinner.

But do not try to deceive your Lord. Do not hide your iniquity. Do not cover your sins with a veil of excuses, for His eyes are as a flame of fire from which nothing is hid. He is the Lord who knows all things, and whose fiery glance pierces the darkest recesses of your heart.

Such a fiery glance destroys the hypocrites. But for the righteous it becomes a beam of light, bringing the light of His grace. When that flaming eye rests on them they are not consumed by the fire of His wrath, but may bask in the glow of His love. And then they sing spontaneously: "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound:

They walk, O Jehovah, in the light of Thy countenance. In Thy name do they rejoice all the day; and in Thy righteousness are they exalted."

This is a comforting thought.

There may be a fear in your heart, however, that you may not claim this blessing for yourself, and that the Lord Jesus can not bless you with His presence because of your little faith. Such fear is easily explained. But it is not to be excused. Do you not realize that the glorified Christ has feet of burning brass? That means that he proceeds with irresistible firmness. When His eye falls on you to bless you with His grace, there is no power on earth that can stop the course of His brazen feet.

The church at Thyatira, to which Christ especially reveals this aspect of His glory, shall indeed experience that these brazen feet carry Him to recompense every one according to his works. But if you are reconciled to God, every step in your direction brings His grace nearer, and even Satan himself cannot check the tread of these brazen feet.

Besides, these brazen feet burn as ore in an oven.

A terrible picture for the godless.

But for you who believe it pictures a rich promise. These burning feet will not consume you. They but scorch and consume whatever there is still found in your heart that is abhorrent to God and to yourself, because it is unholy and unclean.

Even the consuming fire of Christ's majesty will be a blessing for you.

Has this consuming fire not yet become a blessing?

Then listen to His voice as of many waters. It denounces your sins to your face, but it also reveals the glorified Mediator in the majesty of His boundless mercy. The vision that John saw of the Mediator was indeed awe inspiring. But all these awe inspiring details culminate in a revelation of lovingkindness, for the last sentence reads: "And His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength."

Christ is as the sun at midday. Refreshing light. Beaming light. Cherishing light. Piercing light. Healing light. Light that beautifies everything, and makes everything within you grow and flourish. Light that brings joy in your thankful hearts and makes you sing:

A sun and shield forever
Is God, the Lord Most High;
To those who walk uprightly
No good will He deny;
His saints, His grace receiving,
Shall soon His glory see;
O Lord of Hosts, most blessed
Are they that trust in Thee.

AMEN

III

THE KEYS OF DEATH AND HELL

> And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:
>
> I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.
>
> Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;
>
> The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.
>
> —Rev. 1:17-20.

IN the previous sermon we have discussed the first appearance of our Savior to John on the isle of Patmos.

John saw the glorified Christ in the midst of the golden candlesticks, which were representations of the seven churches.

When you read the seven epistles which John had to write to the seven churches you find that Christ not only "stands" in the midst of the candlesticks, but also "walks" among them. That means that Christ is ever laboring for the maintenance and the perfection of His church. Christ

is not an idle observer. On the contrary, He is the guiding Head of His church. He teaches it as Prophet through the service of its ministers. He prays for it as the Priest who has the names of His chosen ones in His heart. And He rules and protects His church as the King of glory.

Christ is walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks. He is not only enthroned far above His church, but is working in her midst as the Captain of her salvation. We have essentially the same message here as when Christ gave the promise: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Christ does not limit His blessed presence to the number of worshippers. No doubt the multitude of people in a church also adds to the glory of the King. But if there are but two or three believers gathered together in Christ's name in some home, or in the open field, or in some barn, then He is in their midst with the fulness of His grace.

It is blessed to experience His strengthening presence when we are gathered in a large or small group, and to feel His nearness in our hearts. When we may say: "The Lord is in our midst!" we are giving a better testimony than when people trumpet their praises over the brilliant sermons they have heard. No oratory is able to take the place of Christ. He alone brings grace, comfort, peace and light. The promise of our Lord to walk in the midst of the candlesticks, and to watch over His church, was most encouraging in the

days of John. The Christians were bitterly persecuted and the hate of sinful man will be still greater towards the end of the world's history. But now the believers knew that the most violent storms would not be able to extinguish the weakest flame that was flickering on a candlestick. Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe in Jesus' power, is the blessed truth which this vision brings to the church.

We now wish to ascertain what John's experiences were when the Christ revealed Himself in glory.

We see that he is first *overwhelmed* with the majesty of the Lord; then, that he is *restored* by the grace of the Lord; and finally, that he is *taught* by the word of the Lord. And these experiences must be ours, if we are to know

Christ Bearing the Keys of Hell and Death.

John is overwhelmed when he sees the majesty and the glory of the exalted Christ appearing in his very presence in this vision. The Lord God has often revealed Himself in visible form to His servants during the Old Testament dispensation. When the brightness of the invisible world would pierce into this earthly life for a moment, people who saw it would be filled with reverent fear and trembling. They would be conscious of their own insignificance before God, and also of their complete unworthiness through their sin and guilt.

We are reminded of Moses standing before the

burning bush. When the Lord there appears to him, and speaks to him out of the bush, he covers his face because he feared to see God.

We are also reminded of Elijah on Mount Horeb. Hardly has he gone out of his cave to see the Lord pass by in the murmur of a still small voice, or he covers his face with his mantle, for who can see God and live?

And Daniel would suddenly be prostrated to the ground when he saw a revelation from heaven, or find that he slowly fainted away, and could only stand on trembling feet after he had received a command from above.

We find the same thing in the New Testament days, when the glory of the Lord would pierce the darkness of the world. When the shepherds in the fields of Ephratha see the radiance of heavenly light gleam over the pastures they are filled with great fear, and when the women are standing at the open grave of Jesus they also need the cheering word of the angel: "Fear not ye!"

We need not be surprised, therefore, that when John on Patmos sees the glory of Christ he feels crushed by this majestic appearance, as he himself writes: "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead!"

As dead!

Literally we read: "as one dead."

Every one of us may draw a lesson from this.

The Lord no longer blesses us with a vision as He did John. He has revealed His whole counsel

of salvation in the Bible. We do not need visions and dreams to receive an impression of Christ's majesty. But if there are points of difference between John and us, there is also a point of comparison.

By means of the gospel Christ reveals Himself spiritually to our soul, and brings us into living contact with Himself. As the glorified Christ, He is, indeed, with His body in heaven, but with His grace, power and majesty He is ever in our midst.

The question which each one of you must now answer for himself is, whether you have the awe of adoration when Jesus reveals Himself to your mind's eye in His glory? Many, alas, know nothing of fear and trembling when they are busy in the holy things of God. They may read God's Word, but when Christ rises from its pages in glory, do you find with such men and women that deep emotion in their hearts that causes them to bend their heads in shame? And where is with some men and women that holy awe that never may be lacking with anyone who approaches the Lord? They go to church, and hardly listen to the word of grace. They seem to pray, but their soul is far from the Lord. They stand in God's presence, but their heart is absent, while they are talking to the Most High. And they thoughtlessly sing God's praise without having a tremor of awe passing through their souls. Can such worship

be compared with the reverence of John: "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead"?

As dead.

That means, crushed as it were by the consciousness of the immeasurable distance between the eternal God, who has come down to men in His Son, and man, who counts his life with brief days, and who is little more than a passing shadow on the world's stage.

As dead.

That means, to be overwhelmed with the majesty and glory of Him who could say: "Before Abraham was, I am," and who yet cares in grace for a mortal who is nothing but a handful of dust and ashes.

As dead.

That means that you are contrite because you are a sinner, while Christ is as spotless as the sunshine.

As dead.

That is, astonished, amazed, embarrassed, that this sinless Christ loves a leprous and corrupt human being. May you thus bow before Christ in the dust, small and unworthy as you are. But then, as John, bow before Jesus' feet; as dead, indeed, but at the feet of your living Lord.

* * *

After John had been overwhelmed by the glory of the Lord so that he fell at His feet as dead, he is raised up and restored again by Christ's grace.

When the apostle describes what Christ did to him he says, "And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the Living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades." (R. V.)

Can you think of a greater love than this, that the Lord lays the right hand of His love and power on your head, when you have bowed yourself to the earth before Him as a guilty sinner?

He has no delight in letting you remain prostrate before Him in your contrition. He rather raises you up, and takes all fear out of your heart by saying, "Fear not, I am the First and the Last."

This was of especial encouragement to John in view of the terrible persecutions of the churches which Christ would soon reveal to him in subsequent visions. Neither now, nor in the terrible days at hand, would the apostle have to fear the majesty of the Lord. This majesty was not destined to crush the faithful disciples. On the contrary, this Divine majesty would watch over them, and protect them with its power.

That is why Christ here calls Himself the First and the Last, a name which the prophets use for God, and by which He is revealed as the Eternal. Christ was the First, for by Him, as the eternal Word, the foundations of the world were laid. He is also the LAST, for He shall judge the world as Son of man. Christ is the heir of all creation. Nothing exists that is not in His power. He is

God to be praised above all, for of Him, and through Him, and unto Him are all things even as with God Himself.

In our greatest distress we need not fear with such a Christ as our Friend. The less so, since He is able to say to John: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive forevermore."

Jesus Christ is not a passing shadow, but the Living One, as we read literally. Even as God He has life in Himself, and is the fountain of all life on earth. He is not impotent as the dead idols, but is the ever living One.

And this is the marvel of His mediatorial mercy: This Living One was dead to atone for the guilt of His people. He has become their substitute. He bore the curse to satisfy the righteousness of God. He reveals the miracle of His grace when He can say to the apostle: "I am the Living One, and was dead!"

Thanks be unto God, He has not remained in the power of death. Good Friday has been succeeded by Easter morning. Then He arose from the depths of death, because death could not keep Him in its grasp. Jesus Christ has been delivered for our offenses, but He has been raised for our justification, for behold, he is alive forevermore. Death has power over Him no more, for He can die no more. HE now has power over death. He Himself declares this when He says to John: "And I have the keys of hell and death!"

Christ therefore presents Himself here as the great Keeper of the keys. He has the keys of hell.

Hell, in this verse, does not refer to the place of damnation where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. For that place of terror the original language of the New Testament uses another word. The Authorized version translates both words with the word hell, which causes untold confusion.

The word that is used for hell in our text is Hades, and refers to the Realm of the Dead, which we enter through the grave. This realm is pictured as a strong unconquerable fortress, in which Death, personified as an Autocrat, rules. It is impossible to escape from this fortress. The king of terrors keeps his fortress closed with strong gates and bars. The man who has once come into the power of this tyrant shall remain in his power forever.

Indeed, this would be true had Christ not conquered that king. But the Mediator of God and man has gone into that prison house. He has entered it of His own free will to redeem the world of guilt and damnation. At the third day, however, as a Samson of old, He has broken the gates of His prison house and has gone out into life. He has left His prison in triumph and entered life eternal. Death is no longer supreme. Hell, or Hades, the realm of the dead, lies now beneath the sway of the Son of man. Such is the mean-

ing of the imagery of Jesus when He says, "I have the keys of death and hell."

He has the keys! He opens the gates of death and the grave, and He only. The king of terrors still exists; he still mows away many lives from the earth. But he has become the slave of Christ, for no one, no one whosoever, can open the gates of the realm of death but Christ only.

This has been the truth that comforted the persecuted churches whenever the gallows and the scaffolds were raised. It seemed then as if Death had complete authority. But this message told them that Death could but execute the commands of Christ, and that no man or woman, no child or infant, enters death unless the great Bearer of the keys, Jesus Christ, opens the heavy gates with His own hands.

Not death, but Christ disposes of your life.

He beckons, and death cuts off your life with its scythe.

He raises His hand, and death slinks away from the sick bed on which his threatening shadow has already fallen. Though your life is as brittle as a flaxen thread, that thread cannot break as long as Christ has not commanded Death to bring you to Him.

When Christ gives the sign the gates of death close behind you.

But Christ also has the prerogative and the power to open these portals again for those who have died. We not only use a key to lock, but also

to open our doors. During his earthly ministry Christ has opened the gates of death on three different occasions, for He has wrought three resurrections with His own hand. And this is a pledge, that He will open the door of the grave for all the dead at His second coming.

But if the everlasting future that comes after that event shall be a blessed future for you, then Christ must first have laid his right hand on you as He did on John, and you must have heard in your soul these blessed words: "Fear not, I am the First and the Last." I was the first to come to you in grace when you were lost in guilt and damnation. For you have not sought me, but I have sought you. I have descended from heaven in your behalf. And I am the Last. I will raise you up at the last day, and then you shall see me as I am!

* * *

And finally John is *instructed* by the word of Christ.

But first the glorified Christ lays a duty upon him: "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter."

John must first preserve for future generations what he has just seen in the vision of the candlesticks. Next he must record the "things which are." This evidently refers to the condition of the seven churches. But since these churches are

typical of all the churches of the future we must also think of the development of the churches to the very last days, which shall usher in the coming of Christ. "The things which are" are therefore recorded in the next two chapters of this book containing the seven letters.

After that we have a description of the things which shall be hereafter. This is a portrayal of the consummation of this age with all its terrors.

After giving this commission Christ gives an explanation of the mystery of the seven stars, which He has in His right hand as a wreath of sparkling gems, and of the seven golden candlesticks, when He says, "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches; and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest, are the seven churches."

On a previous occasion we have given an exposition of the seven candlesticks. We need therefore now but consider the seven stars. Christ says that they are the angels of the seven churches. An angel is in the original simply a messenger, who brings a message in the name of the Lord. He may be a heavenly spirit, or he may be a human being. The ministers of the gospel are called messengers of God who are to bear good tidings and publish peace. That is why they are called the angels of the churches.

Christ compares them to stars.

As the stars, they are darkness in themselves. They receive their light from the Christ, the Sun of righteousness, who is risen in them. With the

blessed message of reconciliation and salvation which they bring, they shine as stars in the world's night. The darkness of ignorance and sin lies upon the people. But as messengers of the gospel they spread light in the darkness. It is not the brilliant light of the sun. It is but the modest light of the stars. But at night that modest starlight is beautiful and comforting.

Jesus calls these things a "mystery."

There was nothing mysterious about the candlesticks as such, since a candlestick was also found in the tabernacle. Nor was the figure of the stars an unknown one. Daniel in his day compared the faithful ministers to stars. The great "mystery" here is the fact that the glorified Priest-King is walking in the midst of the candlesticks, and holds the stars in His right hand. And the readers of this book on a later day were to know that the church of Christ could not be destroyed as long as the Lord of glory watched over her and cared for her. The church cannot disappear from the earth because the everliving Christ holds the ministers as stars in His right hand, guides them and supports them, and prescribes for each of them His course and work, as He guides the stars. Even though the Antichrist himself tries to destroy you, little flock of the Lord, He will not be able to quench the faith of the humblest believer, nor will anyone be able to snatch the stars from Christ's right hand. The future is always in the hands of Christ.

May the Lord make each one of us faithful!

Were the light of God's grace dependent on us, there is no doubt, but all the candlesticks would have been removed ages ago, and there would not be a gleam of heavenly light remaining in your soul. But if God's grace depends on Christ then He will preserve you in the direst days. And at the edge of the grave your flame of faith will let its light shine in the words, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

And as far as we as ministers of the gospel are concerned: may the Lord increasingly enable us for the work of the ministry. We have a glorious office even though in worldly circles it is hardly recognized. On the other hand, our responsibility is also great in an age that does not appreciate the Light from above. But the stars in the firmament pay no attention to the approval or disapproval of men. Though no one looks up, they quietly let their light shine.

The stars also shine without receiving any applause.

And shall the stars of the church then withhold their light because the world deems that it can get along without that light?

We have but one task: to shine, ever to shine, to shine throughout the livelong night.

God has given each one of us his own place in the firmament of the church. There are stars of

first, second, and third magnitude, but they all rest in the hand of Christ.

Our sufficiency is from Christ.

May He elevate us as the stars of heaven, — far above the small bickerings, and the commonplace life of many. May He keep us pure in faith and conduct, unsullied as the stars above. May He hold us fast with the right hand of power and glory. And may He above all enable us to reflect the light of Christ so that the prophetic word of Daniel is realized in us: "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever."

AMEN

LAZARUS

I

LOVE'S DELAY

Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.

(It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)

Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.

When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

—John 11:1-4.

IN the Holy Scriptures we have received from our God a gift that we can not appreciate too highly. There is not another book that is as many-sided as the Bible. You find promises in it for all the circumstances of life.

That is why the Word of God has so many appellations. It is a light on our path and a lamp for our feet to keep us from wandering on the ways of sin. It is the sword of the Spirit with which you can resist the Evil One, so that he flees from you. And for the soul that is yearning for salvation it is refreshing as honey and the honeycomb. But the Bible is of supreme value as a book of comfort for the sinner who is sorrowful after

God, and for all who suffer, and are afflicted, and sick.

The Word of God sympathizes with the suffering of human kind. It weeps with the weeping. Therefore it should be found on the table of every sick-room.

But the children of God find more in the Bible than a comprehending God. The Word of God makes them see their sorrows in their proper aspect, so that they become reconciled to their pain. Therefore we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews the forceful, and yet encouraging message, "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

The chastening lashes reveal God's love.

Your bloody stripes prove that you are His child.

When you have this view of suffering you can understand why this same epistle speaks of the blessings of chastisement. There is a blessing in being chastened. For the present chastening is grievous, but afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.

Such peaceable fruit is seen in the words of our text.

Sorrow leads you to prayer. It brings you on your knees before your God, just as Mary and Martha sent their messenger in haste to Jesus when dark clouds gathered about their home.

As we analyze our text we find mention of a

little village, a happy home and a severe trial. And then we read of an earnest appeal sent to Jesus; of Jesus' encouraging answer, and of his strange delay.

* * *

Where did Jesus perform the great miracle that would lead to His own death?

Not in some renowned city, but in a little village on the eastern slope of Mount Olives, about two miles from Jerusalem. It bore the name of Bethany, which may mean "house of poverty" or "house of dates," since many date-palms are found there. The village still exists, and is now called after Lazarus, which makes it a memorial of Christ's miracle.

The village has now but little attractiveness. With its forty or more huts it has now indeed become a "house of poverty." The foot of the Turk has also caused this place to wither. Travelers are still shown the grave of Lazarus and the home of Mary and Martha, but these are of no historical value.

John calls the village after Mary and her sister Martha, that is, the place where they dwelt with their brother.

There is something beautiful in the simple way in which the Scriptures name the village after these two God-fearing sisters. We are wont to name places after the great men who have lived and worked in them, as the city of Rembrandt or the city of Erasmus. But the Word of God sets

a higher value on quiet piety than on science and art; it calls Bethany the village of Mary and Martha.

Yet these two sisters do not make this village one of the most attractive on earth for our hearts. We love it above all because the footsteps of Jesus are there, and he so often visited the place to refreshen His soul in the quiet of the peaceful village, and to be invigorated by the love of His three friends. From our human viewpoint the life of our Saviour was a life of untold strain. Not just at Golgotha, but from His very birth He had to bear the crushing load of the world's sin. He was in constant toil to deliver fallen human kind from damnation. And men did not ease His task. His enemies ever spied upon Him and laid snares for Him. His disciples did not understand Him. Hardly anywhere did He find a comprehending heart. He was solitary in the midst of a land teeming with people. It grips our hearts to hear Him say that the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but that the Son of man has no place where to lay His head.

Such a constant strain on all the powers of His soul was exhausting. But the Father did not forget the Son. In Bethany He prepared a place for Him where He might find repose in the little circle of His friends. Bethany was a haven of rest.

Rest, refreshing rest after long toil.

Peace, Sabbath peace after heavy labor.

This boon for the Son of man makes Bethany

an unforgetable place for all who love Him. There are places in the Holy Land that are more important in the work of salvation. Gethsemane, Golgotha, and the Mount of Olives are names that are most deeply embedded in your heart.

But the rest that Christ received in the village of Mary and Martha prepared and strengthened Him for the agony of soul which He endured in Gethsemane and Golgotha.

All of us need a Bethany in the battle of life.

We need a home where we can lay aside our armor. We need hearts that beat in sympathy with us, and the handclasp of a friend to encourage us. In this respect also, Christ has become like unto His brethren, (save sin) that He needed moments of rest in His agonizing struggle; moments which would give Him fresh strength to complete His Mediatorial work. Such moments of rest were given Him in Bethany. There He found sympathetic hearts, which not only welcomed Him as a desired Guest, but also as the Saviour of sinners who had come from heaven to seek and to save that which was lost.

* * *

In that quiet home in Bethany a little family of two sisters and one brother dwelt together in unity. They seemed to have been well-to-do people who always entertained our Lord generously when He came into their home. Martha, especially, would busy herself with many things to entertain her Guest.

But earthly possessions are not the greatest blessing in a home. The mutual love between the members of the family is of greater value. And there was no lack of love in this home. The sorrow of the sisters at the death of their brother proves that the members of the family were deeply attached to each other. But even *that* is not the greatest blessing in a home. The greatest blessing is this, that all its members have experienced the grace of Christ, and are united to Him in faith. The natural love that exists between brothers and sisters, and parents and children, can be found under many a roof where worldly people dwell. Yet it remains true that the finest love is lacking in such a home. Not only must there be a bond that unites the members of a family, but they must also be united to Christ in faith and love.

You find this unity in the home in Bethany.

You no longer find it in all *our* homes, even though they are still called Christian homes.

Unanimity in matters of faith and church is more and more disappearing. Each one goes his own way, a way that does not always lead to Jerusalem. Many families have fallen apart, though they still dwell under the same roof. And then the mind of Christ no longer guides and unites all. Father reads his paper, mother her Bible, while the children seek diversion either on the street, or in all kinds of books that stir their passions, or in movies where many a soul has been ruined.

How much more beautiful is the home in Bethany!

How much richer is the life of a home where all confess: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!" You may be assured of the fact, and you probably know by experience, that it is blessed to begin the day with the Word of God; to place all our needs before God in prayer; together to confess our sins and ask for God's grace; and to go together to church on the Lord's day and sing with one accord:

"With grateful heart my thanks I bring,
Before the great Thy praise I sing;
I worship in Thy holy place,
And praise Thee for Thy truth and grace."

When such unity is found in our homes our children will be accustomed to the fear of the Lord from their youth. Each member of the family will retain his individuality; the unity does not become uniformity; there will be unity with a rich variety. Just as the home in Bethany. Its three members were *one* in faith, but otherwise there was great diversity. Martha, the busy and energetic, who would give life long service to her Lord, is the woman of the helping hand in the service of the Kingdom of God. Mary, who annointed Jesus with precious ointment as a preparation for His burial, is the woman of fine feeling, who surmised what no one else surmised, namely, that Jesus was on the way to His sacrificial death. Next to those

two stands Lazarus as one of the quiet in the land. Only his name is mentioned. We know nothing of him except what we read in this chapter. He was therefore a man who remained in the background, whose faith flourished in secret. But this man of retiring mind was also dear to Jesus. The Lord takes notice of the quiet worshippers.

In this home there was unity amid diversity. The light of grace was reflected in many colors according to the disposition of each member. So should it also be under our roofs. A rich variety in characters, but having one Lord, one faith, one hope, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and in you all!

* * *

This blessed home is now in trouble.

Our text first mentions the fact that Mary had anointed Jesus, by which deed she became world renowned. And then John adds: "whose brother Lazarus was sick."

He mentions that illness in the most matter of fact way. And, indeed, there is nothing exceptional about it.

Yet it disturbs us for a moment. We can hardly be reconciled to the fact that the angel of sorrow does not spare the homes of God's children. We would prefer that he would pass them by as the angel of death passed by the houses in Egypt that were marked with blood. That is the secret wish of your heart, isn't it?

If there must be pain and sorrow on earth, would it not testify to greater love if God sent that evil messenger only to the homes of the godless?

Where is the difference between the children of God and the children of the world? There is one event to the righteous and the wicked; to the good and to the clean and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not; as to the good, so to the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. Where is the difference? Is it then in vain to serve God?

Do not such thoughts at times arise in your heart when you see the sicknesses and sorrows that God brings in the homes of those who fear Him?

There is but one answer to such thoughts. All the sorrows of life, its sickness, poverty, care, pain and cross, and death and the grave, are all the bitter fruits of the sin of Adam in whom we all have sinned. Whoever bears the name of sinner receives his portion of the woes of life.

And are not God's children sinners, even though a new principle has been wrought in their soul? The Mary's and Martha's and Lazaruses who love the Lord are wretched sinners in themselves, as every child of God confesses with shame. Why should you complain when every one must bear his own burden?

Do not murmur, but lay your hand on your mouth.

Do not criticize God because He often lets the worst of men suffer less, and the best of men suffer more. Just as He pours out His blessings according to His sovereign pleasure, giving the one much, another little, and another nothing, so He gives His chastisements according to this same sovereign pleasure. He sometimes gives His dearest children the bitterest cup, probably because their spiritual endurance is the greatest. A just Abel falls under the hand of his brother; a Job must sit in ashes; a David is pursued by his own son as a partridge on the hills; and a Lazarus is laid on a sick- and deathbed notwithstanding his piety.

Then we ask again: Is there no difference between the plagues of the godless and the pious?

And the answer must be: Yes, indeed, there is a difference between them as wide as heaven. The difference does not lie in the magnitude or keenness of the pain, but in the hearts of those who are being tried. God's saints bear their sorrows differently, more quietly, and better than the godless. They recognize the hand of God, who chastizes them that they may share His holiness.

The heavier our cross, the nearer to God.

When the stripes become the more severe, we bend our head the lower, and whisper with quivering lips, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, Nor rewarded us after our iniquities."

There is therefore an immeasurable difference.

Bring this message to the sick in your home.

God's children do not only think of their pain and sorrow, but consider the cause of all sorrow, which is sin. They desire to be healed of their sicknesses, if it pleases God. But they still more desire the forgiveness of sin in the blood of the cross. While the unbeliever speaks voluminously of his pains, the believer speaks of his sins.

Tell those of your family and friends who are burdened with sin that a single look of faith on the crucified Redeemer blots out their guilt as a cloud, for the Lord never lets us ask for His grace in vain. Silence all your objections. God frankly forgives. He can be found of the humblest person, no matter how insignificant and unknown in the world. Lazarus received striking help though he occupied no great position in life. John just speaks of him as "a certain man." God sees every upright heart. Whether you are healthy or sick, if you feel burdened by guilt, draw near to God in faith, and He will grant you full forgiveness from free grace. He may not take away your pain, but He will fill you with His peace, and then you can bear the greatest sorrow without murmuring.

In this respect Lazarus is a noble example. You have probably noticed when reading this chapter that he is the only one who remains silent. Mary and Martha speak; the messenger, the disciples, the friends, and Jesus, speak. But Lazarus says not a word. He is silent when he is raised from death. But he is also silent when he lies on his sickbed. This may be explained partly by his

quiet disposition. But it is also a sign of submission to God's will. The secret of his silence is found in the words that "Jesus loved him." When you have the assurance of His love in your heart all burdens become light, and the days of illness the most blessed. Then the Lord makes your home a Bethel, a house of God.

* * *

Mary and Martha now send an earnest appeal to Jesus.

Whenever Jesus would come into their house there would be light in their hearts and home. But the darkness had come when He had left them and gone to Perea, on the other side of Jordan. Sorrow always comes at an inconvenient time and can not be dismissed. Lazarus became sick, and you know how anxious all become when some one is sick. Then the sun is darkened. All have anxious looks upon their faces, though they try to hide them from one another. And if we fear that the sickness is a prelude to death, our hearts beat fast, and we sometimes flee to a quiet corner to weep and to pray.

They did not forget Jesus in that home in Bethany.

They knew where to find Him. And though the distance was rather far, they send a messenger with the earnest appeal: "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick."

A short, but full prayer.

No voluble explanation. They do not fear that the Lord will not realize the seriousness of their condition. And they did not need to fear, for the Lord loved them because of His former fellowship with them, and then a single word suffices. Oh, if you have not become the friend of Jesus in the days of health, then you will have to fear in the days of distress that you are a stranger to Him. People who only think of God in days of darkness, and otherwise hardly ever bend their knees before Him, do not dare to send a swift appeal to Him in their distress with the assurance that He comprehends all. But if you daily have fellowship with Him then it will suffice simply to lift up your heart to God at the sickbed of your dear ones and say, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick!"

How modest is this petition!

Mary and Martha do not ask Jesus to come and heal Lazarus, nor do they ask that He come to comfort them with an encouraging word. They simply let Him know what has happened, and leave the rest to His love and wisdom. They do not want to prescribe His course. Whatever he may decide will please them. If He works a miraculous cure they will thank Him on their knees. But if He decides that Lazarus must be taken from them they will bear it quietly, without murmuring. But He must know their sorrow. They may not keep silence. They must pour out their hearts to Him, and then He may do as He deems fit. So

they simply pray: "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick."

Here you have the confidence of faith.

You seem to be in a house of prayer instead of at a sickbed. It takes grace to utter such a trusting prayer in times of trouble. It takes grace to leave everything to God, and say, "Let the Lord do what is right in His eyes!"

But then we need a firm basis for our petitions.

On what do Mary and Martha plead? They do not say, "Lord, he who loves thee is sick." Theirs is a far greater testimony. "Lord, he whom *Thou* lovest is sick." Your love to Christ can never be the basis of your plea. Though your love be ever so sincere it can not be a firm foundation. But the Lord's love to *you* is a foundation that will never fail. The love of the Lord is an eternal, unchangeable, and faithful love, that never faileth. And they who experience that love may pray, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick!"

* * *

Jesus gave an *encouraging answer* to this prayer.

Jesus must have been deeply moved by the message from Bethany for it concerned one whom He dearly loved. And He says to His disciples in the presence of the messenger who would report His words to Mary and Martha: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby."

What did Jesus mean with these puzzling words?

When he says that the illness of Lazarus is a means to glorify God, and to glorify Him as the Son of God, we know that both the death and resurrection of Lazarus were before His mind. Therefore He could say that this sickness was not unto death. It would lead through death to life. Death would release Lazarus again on the mighty word of Him who is the resurrection and the life.

But Mary and Martha did not know God's counsel as did Jesus. The words of Christ could not have had that full significance for them. They could but think that this sickness would not lead to death, and that Lazarus would arise again from his sick-bed.

How could Jesus create such expectations when He knew that Lazarus would die? Was that not cruel? No, indeed not. It was a means to make their faith active. Soon they will be standing by the corpse of their dead brother. And then they will need faith. Here lies the cold body. And there lies the promise that this sickness will not be unto death. It seems that the promise of the Saviour is torn to shreds. And yet, He cannot lie. Faith always lays hold of the promise even though everything we see seems to contradict the promise. Lazarus is dead. But the Lord has said that he will live. And Mary and Martha must rather believe the word of God than their own eyes and the cruel facts. Now you know what Jesus meant

with His ambiguous answer. He wants to teach them to rely solely on His promise.

Relying on God's promise,—that is what we need in the days of sickness and anxiety. When the Lord stretches you or one of your dear ones on a sick-bed he does not promise that your sickness will not be unto death, but that it will be to the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby. And that is a great promise. Our sick do not always hold fast to this promise, though the Lord wishes to encourage them with it. They often do not understand that one can glorify God on a couch of pain. They think that God is glorified by our work, by our care for our family, and by our walk in the fear of the Lord. But how can He be glorified when they cannot move a finger for his cause?

You that speak thus, how little you understand God's purpose!

You glorify God on your sickbed when you quietly submit to Him, and pray that His will may prevail in your life, and that every murmur may be taken from your heart. You glorify Him by placing the needs of your dear ones before Him in prayer. You glorify Him when you ask for strength to bear your sorrow, and to make the days of sickness conducive to your eternal welfare. And if you then may arise from your sickbed with a fuller joy, a deeper peace, and a firmer faith in your Saviour, your sickness was not unto death, but for the glory of God. And years after you

will testify that in those dark days the Son of God was glorified in your soul.

* * *

But now our text speaks of a *strange delay.*

Though Christ had given an encouraging answer to the messenger, He remained for the time being where He was. His hour to glorify the Father in the resurrection of Lazarus was not yet come. Though He was sure that the sorrow of Mary and Martha would turn to joy, He did not go beyond the will of His Father, but waited patiently for a sign from above to fulfill God's counsel in respect to Lazarus.

Some might think that He delayed from indifference. John sets aside this evil thought by telling us, "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus." Yet he remains two full days where He is.

This delay was painful for Mary and Martha.

But they were not the only ones who experience such delay. Who has not experienced that the answer to his prayer was delayed? We hardly ever find our prayers answered at once, even though that prayer rests on a definite promise of God, so that we may expect an answer in all confidence. And many prayers remain unanswered. This is usually the case because God cannot grant your request since it would not be for your welfare. Children sometimes try to take a sharp knife and by no means appreciate your refusal to

give it to them, but you refuse because you love those little ones. In the same way the children of God often seek that which would harm them. And if the Lord then refuses your request it may seem harsh but it manifests His grace and faithfulness.

The answer to the prayer of Martha and Mary was simply delayed, however. Jesus was going to help them, but He would decide *when*. They must now learn the hard lesson of patient waiting. Remember this page of Scripture when you do not at once receive what you have asked of your God. Many mothers pray in the inner chamber for the conversion of their child, and it seems in vain. Many fathers pray for the return of a prodigal who is wasting a beautiful life herding swine, and years pass by before the answer comes. And sometimes it seems that you pray in vain for the assurance of faith, for the forgiveness of sins, and for deliverance from the assaults of Satan which bring cruel suffering to your soul.

If the answer is delayed for years you think that the Lord has dismissed your petitions. Then you forget that the answer often comes slowly. How long did not Zacharias have to wait for the birth of his son? How long did not the Syro-Phenicean have to wait before the Lord helped her child? And shall you then demand a swift answer?

Though He tarry, wait for Him.
Abide Him in quiet confidence.
And then read between the lines of these

verses. Then you see that though Jesus was bodily in Perea His heart was in Bethany. For He says afterwards that Lazarus sleeps, Lazarus has died, though no second messenger has come.

Does that not prove that He with eyes Divine has seen everything from afar, and that His heart was with Mary and Martha, though bodily he was far from them? If then God delays to answer your prayer do not think that He has forgotten you. He sees your anguish from His high heaven. He gathers your tears in His bottle. Your sorrow is not unknown to Him. In all your afflictions He is afflicted.

And do not forget that though He does not at once grant your request, He yet speaks to your soul. As He sent a word of encouragement to the sisters in Bethany, so He gives courage and strength to your soul that you may not faint while waiting. He supports you by His grace while you are waiting for an answer.

And that answer will be full of joyous surprise.

Much greater and richer than your poor prayer.

Your prayers are copper pennies. His answer is the gold of grace.

You ask that Lazarus may be healed. And He answers by raising him from the depths of the grave!

AMEN

II

LAZARUS, OUR FRIEND, SLEEPETH

Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judea again.

His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?

Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.

But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.

These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.

Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.

Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.

Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.

—John 11:7-16.

IF we quietly meditate on verse after verse of this chapter we must come to the conclusion that God sometimes leads His children in strange ways.

Mary and Martha had sent a message to Jesus telling Him of the illness of Lazarus. They had not asked Him to come. They had simply left the whole matter in His hands. They knew that Jesus loved each one of them, and that they therefore could leave everything to His sympathetic mind.

The delay of two days to which we referred in a previous sermon was already a strange delay. But then try to imagine what Mary and Martha must have experienced when four days pass by before the Lord comes. They did, indeed, have the wonderful promise of Jesus that this sickness would not be unto death, but that the Son of God would be glorified thereby. But when Lazarus died the Lord seemed to have cancelled His promise.

You can imagine how severely the faith of Mary and Martha was tried. And as if this were not enough, Jesus lets these two broken-hearted women in their bitter sorrow, without giving the least word of comfort. They were anxiously waiting for Him, for they could not dismiss the promise from their minds that the Son of God would be glorified in the illness of Lazarus. But they are bitterly disappointed. The mountains depart, and the hills are removed. All their hope is gone.

The hour for the funeral has come.

But Jesus is not present.

Even now He leaves Mary and Martha in their loneliness. And yet they do not doubt His love.

They think that it is impossible for Him to come. As you consider these things you must conclude that God often leads His dearest children in a strange way.

But now the moment has come to explain the mystery.

Jesus tells His disciples that He is going to Judea. His disciples utter serious objections to His plan. Jesus justifies His decision by saying that He is walking in the light of day. Then He tells them of the death of Lazarus by saying that Lazarus sleeps. And when this figure is misunderstood by His disciples, He tells them plainly that Lazarus has died, but that He will raise Him from death. As we meditate on these things may the words of Thomas become ours with a richer significance, and may we say: "Let us also go, that we may die with Him!"

* * *

Our text speaks first of a *decision* made by Jesus.

When the disciples heard the message from Bethany they must have thought that He would go at once to Mary and Martha. To their surprise He stays in Perea.

This was a matter of joy for the disciples.

Jesus had left Judea for Perea because the Jews tried to kill Him. The disciples were afraid that He would return to that dangerous locality to comfort Mary and Martha in their distress. They

are greatly relieved when Jesus remains in Perea and does not seem to think of leaving.

But after two days they are suddenly disturbed by hearing Jesus say, "Let us go into Judea again."

He does not ask them what they think of His plan. He does not propose that they go to Bethany to see how Mary and Martha bear their sorrow. He does not even mention Bethany, but names Judea, to show them that He knows what He is doing when He goes to Bethany. He does not come with a request or a proposition, but with a determined decision. He has considered the danger, and says, "Let us go into Judea again."

Let us consider this statement for a moment. It reveals the heart of Christ. His determination to go to Bethany, to Judea, where the cross awaited Him, is bound up with the salvation of the world. He submits to the Father's will. We may write above the Saviour's Mediatorial work the words: "Let us go!"

When Christ left His abode of glory, and when He went to Golgotha, as well as when He went to Bethany, He was willingly obedient to the Father's command. Then also He said, "Let us go!"

You can apply this truth to your own salvation. This occurs at an appointed hour, just as the help that came to Mary and Martha. Some will complain that they have prayed for grace, and for the forgiveness of sins ever so long. The time seems unduly long, before they receive the assurance that Christ has taken away their sins forever.

You probably doubt whether you will ever be able to rejoice in salvation. Others precede you, while you are wavering between hope and fear. Can the Lord have forgotten you? My brother, this is your hour of waiting; these are the two days of tarrying, the time for patient watching, as it was for Mary and Martha in Bethany. Soon your hour of joy comes, for Jesus will say, "Let us go!" Let us go to that seeking soul to grant it the blessing of grace!

* * *

The disciples utter serious *objections* to Jesus' plan.

They do not consider their own interests, but they love Jesus and think they must protect him against Himself. "How can He decide to leave this safe haven of refuge? Just two months ago His life had been in danger in Judea. Was it not reckless to return there? A person may not court danger! It might be true that Mary and Martha needed aid. Ordinarily they would not have objected to Jesus visting them to comfort them. But Jesus' life was more important than that of Lazarus." So they voice their objections by saying, "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone Thee; and goest Thou thither again?"

We love the disciples for those words. They tell of their devotion to their Master. Yet they err greatly. We do not have to protect Jesus. He must protect us. They did not understand that no

stone could strike Jesus, and no hair could fall from His head, as long as His hour to suffer and die was not come. Nor did they know that Jesus was obeying His Father, so that He was not in the least reckless.

Jesus does not let His disciples check Him.

It had often been tried. When He set His face like flint to go to Jerusalem, Peter tried to check Him because He loved His Master. But Jesus reproves him by saying that just then he was a satan who did not understand the things of God.

So also when He has decided to save you, all the powers of the world can not hinder Him to bring His blessings to your soul.

Your own heart can come with its objections. Lord, I am not worthy of Thy grace, for I have lived so many years in sin. My sorrow is not deep enough. My trust is too weak. There are thousands who are better than I. Why shouldest Thou love a sinner such as I am.

And then satan comes and says that there is no hope for you, and that you bear the brand of Cain, the brand of the damned. He tells you that you should have accepted Christ in your youth, and that now it is too late.

Do not listen to these objections. The Lord will finish the work He has begun. You can put your trust in Him.

* * *

What did Jesus say to *justify* His course?

He tells the disciples that this is not a decision

made on the spur of the moment, but is made in obedience to God's will and command. "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" he asks. And then He explains: "If a man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because the light is not in him."

A beautiful figure of speech. You proceed safely as long as the sun shines upon you. Then you are not in danger of falling over some object. But if you walk at night you can easily stumble, for you have no light in yourself, and the sun does not shine.

And Jesus then? Did He walk at night when He decided to go to Judea? Far from it. The Father was lighting up His path. He followed the Father's guidance. God was sending Him to Bethany and Judea. Why should He fear the enmity of the Jews? He was inviolable as long as He walked in the light of God's will. As each day has twelve hours of light, so also the day of His life. And though His life's day was drawing to a close, it was yet light, and no harm could befall Him.

This is not only true of Jesus.

He generalizes and says, "If any man walk in the day." This truth therefore applies to all of us. And we may ask whether we are walking on our life's path with the quiet assurance that filled Jesus as danger threatened? Many walk in the night because they do not see the light of God's will shine on their path. Men try to pave their

own way, and think they need no light from on high. Then they feel about in the darkness, and necessarily stumble and fall. By nature we all walk in darkness. But when the light of God's grace arises over us, and our eyes take in its light, then we are also light within. Then we are led in the path of God's Word.

We need never doubt what to do in any circumstances. There is always God's guidance which says, "This is the way, walk ye in it." Then we are safe in God's care.

We are bound to fulfill God's counsel. We do not die a moment too soon. Nor do we live a moment longer, if our Godgiven task is finished. No breadwinner is taken away before God's time. No mother is taken from her children before God's time. Nor does God take an infant from its cradle till the twelve hours of its day are passed, though, alas, these hours are but moments.

Are these hours of our life not brief?

The longest life seems short when it is almost gone.

Let this be a warning to you if you are not yet a child of light, but are still a child of darkness. What hour has struck in your life? Is it almost the eleventh? Well then, there is a parable in the Bible in which the Lord calls for laborers even in the eleventh hour. It is more beautiful by far to have walked in the light of God's countenance from our youth. Early piety is a great blessing. Then you walk through the years without fear of

danger. Without any presumption on your part you may then say that you are immortal till your task on earth is done.

May God give us and our children that blessing.

Our day is but brief.

We speak of years, the Bible of hours.

May then all those fleeting hours be dedicated to the service of God by walking in the light of His Word. Then you can see the hands of the clock move toward midnight, and you can smile. And when the twelve strokes of the twelfth hour fall, your last words will be a hymn and a prayer:

"Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens, Lord, with me abide:
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!

"Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see:
O Thou who changest not, abide with me!

"I need Thy presence ev'ry passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!"

* * *

Jesus now speaks of Lazarus' death under the loving *figure* of sleep. "Our friend, Lazarus, sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep."

Jesus here compares death to sleep.

Death and sleep have been called brothers. They have, indeed, much in common. Jesus does

not wish to say that the souls of the departed are in a condition of numb unconsciousness. The advocates of soul-sleep may think this, but they err greatly. Scripture does not tell us much of the condition of the souls of the departed. But this is sure, that they do not exist in a state of dull unconsciousness, out of which they will be first awakened by the last trumpet. The souls of the believers are in Paradise with Christ. They enjoy his fellowship far better than is possible here on earth. They have fellowship with the saints above and commune with them. They worship and praise the Triune God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. That message is far better than the folly that people descend into a state of unconsciousness. Our dead rejoice before the throne of God, if they in this life belonged to our faithful Saviour.

Death is not sleep, but looks like sleep.

As you rest in sleep after the work and toil of the day, our dear ones rest from their toil and care, their anxiety and sorrow, and all the pain of this fallen world, when they have gone through the valley of the shadows of death. Above all do they rest from sin. No unholy thought flits through their mind; no evil passions disturb their soul. They are not only delivered from sin, but also from all desire and temptation to sin.

Never begrudge your dear ones that rest. They have gone through the wilderness of this world as pilgrims. Sometimes the way was burdensome.

Often their hearts were heavy. Now they are in the heavenly Canaan where all wandering, and sighing, and tears are forever past. There remaineth a rest for the people of God.

Death is also a sleep in another sense.

Your sleep unites evening and morning. It brings you through the night to the dawn of a new day. The sleep of death does likewise. It becomes dark round about you, when you lie on your deathbed. The working world departs in darkening mists. You finally do not even recognize the faces of your loved ones. Night envelops you on all sides, a night so dark as you have never experienced before. But hardly are the eyes of the body broken in the night of death, or the eyes of your soul open in the light of heaven, and you find yourself in the gleaming glory of God. It is the light of eternity. There is no sun there, for God Himself is your eternal light.

And then we find yet another similarity between death and sleep.

When you retire at night you expect to awake in the morning. When you awake you are not tired and worn, as the evening before, but are refreshed and strengthened for the tasks of the new day. Such a joyful awakening is awaiting you after the sleep of death. Jesus said of the deceased Lazarus, " I go to awake him out of sleep." Once again will He utter that word. It will be when He comes again on the clouds of heaven. He then comes from glory, from the

Father's house. He then comes to this earth to crown His Mediatorial work. He will raise up all His friends to a new, blessed life on a renewed and glorified earth where righteousness dwells.

Will you share this blessed resurrection?

You will, if, as Lazarus, you are a friend of Him and of His church. A friend who clings to Him in faith and love. A friend, who once was an enemy, but has now experienced the work of grace. Then you can quietly lay down your head on your deathbed, for your resurrection will not be to everlasting shame, but to everlasting life!

* * *

These words of Jesus are *misunderstood* by the disciples, however.

They thought that Jesus spoke of taking rest in sleep. They could hardly think otherwise, for Jesus had said that the sickness of Lazarus would not be unto death. So they say: "Lord, if he is fallen asleep, he will recover."

They knew how sick people recovered. When the fevers heat the veins the patient restlessly tosses to and fro. And all give a sigh of relief when they see that the eyelids close, and sleep conquers the wornout sufferer. At many a bedside they then bend their knees in thanksgiving to God, for this peaceful sleep is often a precursor to complete health.

The disciples were therefore not stupid. They were sober and practical.

Jesus therefore tells them plainly: "Lazarus is dead."

You probably realize at once why Jesus spoke in figurative language at first, before He came with the terrible truth. He did this to prepare their minds for the miracle of the resurrection. He had told them that this sickness of Lazarus would be to the glory of God, that the Son of man might be glorified thereby. The death of Lazarus seemed to have frustrated this promise. But Jesus wishes to teach His disciples that the promise still stands. Therefore He compares death to sleep. What is easier than to awaken a sleeping man? If they will keep this figure before their minds, He can tell them of Lazarus's death, and they may grasp the thought that He is able to raise Lazarus from the grave and be glorified thereby.

Jesus may have had an additional purpose.

Lazarus was not only His, but also their friend. Therefore He said, "Lazarus, *our* friend, sleepeth." When one of your friends dies, and you hear this unexpectedly, you are shocked. A kind heart does not bring such a message roughly. It would be inhuman to suddenly enter a home and tell of the death of a friend, a father, a mother, or a child. Such coarseness hurts. The mind of Christ is different. His grace gives you words that are kind, and that spare the feelings of the bereaved.

If ever you are called to bring such a sad tiding, do not avoid it. Many place such a burden on others. That is also hard and cruel. Do not shun

to bring a message of sudden death to a family. They must be told. But bring the sad tidings in a careful way. Remain unhurried. Respect their weakness. Come to your final message slowly and carefuly. The Lord will give you wisdom. And as you speak, look directly at the bereaved. Grip their hands, and then tell them softly that their loved one is sleeping the final sleep of death.

* * *

Jesus now gives a fuller *explanation* of His words.

The disciples now knew that Lazarus had died. They may have been surprised for the moment, because no second messenger had come from Bethany, but they knew that Jesus as the Son of God knew what had happened.

Then what did Jesus mean when he said, "And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him."

I am glad, says Jesus, at a deathbed, at the deathbed of a bosom friend.

He was not glad because of Mary and Martha. How could this be possible with Jesus, the tenderhearted? He showed His sorrow when He wept at Lazarus' grave.

Nor was He glad for the sake of Lazarus. It is a matter of joy if our dear ones fall asleep in Christ. They have a better life above than any friends can give them here on earth. But this joy

is tempered by the sadness of those that remain behind.

Jesus is glad for the sake of His disciples. He would raise Lazarus from the grave, and when His disciples would see that miracle their weak faith would be made strong, and Jesus would be glorified before their eyes in an unusual way.

Does this explanation of Jesus have any special meaning for you? When you have lost a dear one it is so human and natural to think solely of your own sorrow, and forget the world about you. The Lord will not take this amiss. He knoweth our frame. He knows how attached you are to your relatives and remembers your sorrow at your loss. But such a loss can be a fountain of blessing, a means of strengthening the faith of other believers, if the Son of God is glorified in your sorrow. He will not glorify Himself by raising the dead at once. But if other believers see that you bear your loss quietly, without murmuring, and as a David wash your head, and do not disfigure your face with passionate outbursts of grief, then the grace of Christ is glorified in you. Then something of Christ is seen in you, who was silent as a sheep before its shearers. Then your sorrow is a blessing to others. Their faith is strengthened. You are giving them a staff to support their tottering steps.

This spiritual gain is completely lost to some disciples, however. At least, we notice no such gain by Thomas. He only sees the dark side. We

read: "Thomas therefore, who is called Didymus, said unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

He forgets altogether that Jesus has said that He is going to awake Lazarus from the sleep of death. He does not seem to have believed it. He only sees the dangers that threaten Jesus in Judea. But though he doubted that Jesus would raise Lazarus, he still has a consuming love for Christ in his heart, for he says, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

There you have a complete picture of Thomas.

John translates his Hebrew name in Greek to reveal his character. Both Didymus and Thomas mean twin. There are two persons in Thomas. The one doubts Jesus' power to raise the dead, and later even doubts that Jesus arose from the dead, unless he sees the signs of the nails; the other is ready to die with Jesus, and seal his faith with his blood.

Two souls in one man.

Believing and unbelieving at one and the same time.

A downhearted doubter and an heroic confessor.

We have within us a world of contrasts that we cannot reconcile. Among life's problems we ourselves are the greatest problem. No one fully understands man, for no one fully understands himself.

Our name is Didymus.

Have we not often shown ourselves to be such twin personalities?

But faith must gain the victory in us. Heavy-hearted doubt must go. That takes place in Judea. It takes place on Golgotha in Judea. There is the awful cross. On that cross your old, unbelieving nature must die with Christ, that the man of faith may arise. You must first die with Christ to live with him forever.

AMEN

III

A DOOR OF HOPE

Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already.

Now Bethany was night unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off:

And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him; but Mary sat still in the house.

Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.

Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

—John 11:17-24.

WHEN we read the Psalms it often seems as if we are reading our own hearts. In the Psalms we find our own trials and our own aspirations. That is the reason why the Psalms are loved by men and women who have learned to know themselves in the light of God's Spirit. The Psalms rejoice and sing, but they also mourn and weep, even as we. Next to touching penitential songs we find the hymns of praise

thanking the Lord for His salvation. And you find many a plea for mercy which might have come form your own lips.

That is because the real author of the Psalms is not a human mind, but the Holy Spirit who searches the depths of human hearts, and reproduces in human language the thoughts that agitate our minds.

Not only does the Holy Spirit do that. If you read the Psalms carefully you will notice that those Psalms that speak of our darkest hours also bring gleams of hope from Above. Man with his sin and sorrow is not only found in the Psalms, but God also with the light of His grace. The Psalms express the depths of our woe, but over those depths are spread out the brilliant heavens of our God to give us new strength and courage when we would despair.

The Forty-Second Psalm proves this.

It is a Psalm of tears. The joy of the Psalmist belongs to the past when he went with the throng to the house of God to praise the Lord with the multitudes that kept holyday. How sad is the present compared with that glorious past! He now goes in mourning and seems to have a sword in his bones. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of God's waterfalls.

But right through this somber darkness beams the light of God's glory. God still lives for the Psalmist. And the consciousness of the nearness of God makes him sing: "Why art thou cast down,

O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance!"

Something of this mood is found in the words of our text. Darkness wellnigh reigns in the home in Bethany, but we also see gleams of light. We hear how the heavy-hearted are bouyed up. We read of human sympathy; of complaint to God; of hope in Him; of the opening of a door of hope by Christ; and of entering that door of hope, may it be, not only by Martha, but also by us. Then we can sing: "Hope thou in God, O my soul!"

* * *

I. We read of *human sympathy* in our text, a sympathy experienced by Martha and Mary. In days of sorrow such sympathy is a blessing for those that mourn.

Lazarus had been buried, and the emptiness that death brings to a home was now being felt. As long as the body is not yet buried there are so many things to attend to, that the loss suffered is not felt in all its keenness. But when we return from the cemetery the home is so lonely and desolate. For you must not forget that Mary and Martha miss the comfort of Jesus. They did not even know that He was on the way to change their night of sorrow into a day of joy, and give them beauty for ashes.

But Mary and Martha were not altogether forgotten.

The little family must have enjoyed a splendid reputation, and the general sympathy explains the note of John: "and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother." Not just a few neighbors, but many others came also.

Surely, here also all was not gold that glittered. At the end of this chapter you read that some of these Jews went to the Pharisees in Jerusalem to report the resurrection of Lazarus with evil intent. But even though there is much external formality in the calls of condolence, then and now, it yet comforts a grieving heart to see many come to express their sympathy.

Our Creator has so made us that we need one another in days of sorrow. We may not repulse such sympathy.

We all need such expressions of sympathy. Our friends feel the need of calling on us when our home is being emptied of a dear one. They wish to prove that we are not forgotten, and that we can rely on them in the hour of loneliness. There is an impulse in their hearts to comfort us.

But the question is: How must we comfort those that are bowed down in sorrow?

Alas, many do not know how to comfort. Many say they have no gift for expressing comforting words, and therefore avoid the grief-stricken home. And if they do call they sit about helpless, and ill at ease, often causing grief instead of alleviating it. Yet it seems to me that, if we have

hearts that are tender and sympathetic, it will not be difficult to bring a little cheer to those who are broken in spirit.

But then you must not come with a prepared speech. That will make you formal and unnatural, and instead of touching the grieving hearts you will remain miles distant from them, even though standing in their very presence. You cannot prepare comfort beforehand. Real comfort wells up spontaneously. If you must hunt for words there is something wrong. Your comfort must well up as water from a spring to lave the weary hearts.

So often we hear words of comfort that are banal. Always the same stereotyped expressions, whether a child or a father or mother is being carried to the grave. Words as old coins whose image and superscription is worn away by constant usage.

But where, you ask, can a sympathetic person be found who is never at a loss for words?

Let it be true that you are heavy of speech.

That is no reason why you should avoid a home in mourning. In our text we do not read of a single word spoken by the many Jews to Mary and Martha. Of course, they spoke, but the main thing was their presence. Your presence alone is often the richest comfort. Silent sympathy strengthens. A tear-dimmed eye, and a warm handclasp, can express our love. We can point upward, to heaven, where light shines eternal. And then a

brief word taken from the Bible will quite likely bring the greatest comfort to those that mourn.

* * *

II. The *sympathetic love* of the Jews cheered Mary and Martha.

But there is a greater comfort than that. Our hearts are lightened when we can *utter our grief* to the Lord as did Martha. You may imagine how her heart was stirred when some one whispered to her that Jesus was coming. At last He came! She had not doubted Him. She had laid in her heart that word that this sickness would not be unto death, but to the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. But it had been so bitter to miss Jesus in those days of sorrow. And now her heart leaps for joy when she hears that He is near.

The house is full of Jews.

The message was evidently brought in secret. And now Martha reveals her lively disposition by running from the house without even telling the glad tidings to Mary. She leaves the visitors behind with Mary. She can not let herself be ruled by circumstances. She must hasten to the Lord to tell her grief.

We can't help but love this energetic Martha even though she acts rather tumultuously. We can so easily understand that she follows the impulse of her heart and forgets all other matters. There is but *One* who can really help and com-

fort her. To Him she speeds. Soon she kneels at His feet to pour out her bitter complaint into His sympathetic ears: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died!"

Martha is not uttering a reproach. Her trust in Jesus is unbroken. But she bewails the fact that Jesus had not been present at the bedside of Lazarus. She feels sure that then her brother would have been spared. For where Jesus is, the dead can become alive, but the living can not die. . . . . O, Woman, great is thy faith! Thou utterest thy complaint, not in unbelief and bitterness, as an unbeliever who becomes bitter in his lament. Thy complaint reveals a faith firm as a rock: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died!"

Thus may you also complain in your sorrow. Such lament is not sinful.

It is lamenting before the throne of grace in the ear and heart of God.

There is naturaly much lamentation in the homes where death has entered, but all lamenting is not of the right kind. Often people complain more about God than to God. "Why has He not revealed His omnipotence by commanding the disease to flee from our home? Why has He forgotten us with His saving help? Why must that loss strike us, when so many are rescued from the brink of the grave? Why has the Lord not hearkened to our prayers?"

Such complaint reveals dissatisfaction and unbelief.

Then we imagine we are wiser and kinder than God. Oh, if we could rule the world, such blows would not fall! Divine Providence is full of mistakes! Then our complaint becomes a complaint against the providence of God. Then we demand an account of a God who does not give account of His deeds, which are always majesty and glory.

May the Lord keep you from such complaint in the days of grief.

Flee rather with your burdened heart to the throne of grace, and tell your God in full confidence how hard it is for you to bear the grief that He measures out to you. But let your lament show that you are not murmuring against His incomprehensible guidance. The Lord never does injustice. All His paths, even those that lead through the depths, are mercy and truth. Firm, Martha-like faith must shine through your tears. The murmuring complaint will but increase your grief. But the prayerful and trustful complaint will bring relief. Then you arise from your knees with the words of the Psalmist singing in your heart: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the help of my countenace and my God!"

* * *

III. Martha *hoped* in God. She was sure that if Jesus had been in Bethany, Lazarus had not

died. And this assurance causes her to say in sublime faith: "And even now I know that, whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give thee!"

But even now I know!

Hold fast to that word for a moment.

Faith is not a weak surmise, a guess, or a supposition, but a certain knowledge and a firm trust. You find this with Martha. She stands before a hopeless case. Lazarus is already four days in the grave. According to human judgment there is not the least expectation that he will return to this life. Yet her faith conquers the power of facts by saying: "Even now I know that, whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give it thee!"

Whatsoever thou shalt ask of God!

Lay hold of that word for a moment also.

The desire, the petition, the prayer of Christ is for Martha the only, but also the certain means whereby God, if it please Him, will reveal His miraculous power to these bereaved sisters. Not on the prayers of the sisters themselves will God act, but on the intercession of Christ. That is the foundation on which she builds. What men may pray our heavenly Father indeed hears and considers. But when Christ prays the prayer is not only heard, but granted. The Father never repels the intercession of the Son. We, little creatures and sinners, must plead, and then reverently await the answer. But the prayer of the Son is a demand that cannot be gainsaid. In His High-priestly prayer He declared: "Father, I will, that

they be with me whom Thou hast given unto me." This is His attitude towards all our needs of body and soul. If He can and will pray for us the impossible is possible. Martha knows this when she says: "Even now I know that, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee."

Remember this testimony of Martha, beloved. God redeems us from the depths. His arm is not shortened to help, when according to your own mind no help is longer possible. "Hope thou in God."

Hope in God in the afflictions of your present life. They are diverse and many. For the one a sorrow as in Bethany. For the other the care for daily bread. While a third looks daily for steady work and fears he is forgotten. A fourth is anxious about his children who are probably causing care and grief. A fifth bows beneath a cross, or has a thorn in his flesh which hinders him in fulfilling his earthly task. To all comes the encouraging word: "Hope thou in God!"

You also have needs for your soul which will sometimes bow you down more than the cares of life. An enlightened and awakened conscience is oppressed with the burden of sin and guilt. The worldling is not plagued with this burden, since the Spirit of God has not yet taken the veil from his eyes. But if you have received grace you know what this burden is. Then self-accusation increases the grief over your transgression. Then you accuse yourself because you have often

willfully walked into the net of Satan, and have but few times been surprised into sin. And then Satan whispers that you are beyond redemption. You would despair of salvation unless you heard the cry: "Hope in God!"

With the Lord is plenteous redemption.

* * *

IV. Jesus now *opens a door of hope* for Martha when He says: "Thy brother shall rise again."

Many doors are shut to us in life. For most of us the doors of the temples of science and art are closed. And we mourn but little about it.

But we may not feel at ease if the door of the kingdom of heaven is and remains shut: the door of forgiveness and peace with God, the door of fellowship with Christ, the door to the Father's house, where many mansions are. By sin, these doors are closed to us. Praise God, we need not forever remain without. God can open these doors, and has done so for many of you.

No door is so firmly shut, however, as the door of the grave.

If you have brought some dear brother to the devouring grave then that seems to end all. Dead and buried,—what can we yet hope? The grave is deep. Death puts a period at the end of our lives. A period and a long dash. No one dares to open a door of hope on a cemetery. But what is impossible with man, Christ does for a grieving Martha: "Thy brother shall rise again."

In its deepest sense this promise of our Lord meant that He would recall Lazarus to this present life. He expresses Himself in such a way, however, that Martha could also think of the general resurrection at the last day. We shall soon see that she actually thought this. For the present we wish to show you how the Lord comforts those that mourn. He brings them a message that death does not end all. The deep grave is but a couch from which the dead will arise as soon as He awakens them from death's sleep.

The Lord does not pass by the griefstricken.

Many people, who otherwise are good natured, avoid the homes that have a crepe on the door because they do not know how to bring true comfort, the comfort of the Gospel. They often envy the men and women who can calmly enter a bereaved home, and light up the darkness with the words: "Thy brother shall rise again."

This one word, "resurrection," brings to the friends of Jesus the music of the golden bells of eternity. The brokenhearted raise their heads; they stand in the light; a Sabbath peace enters their soul; and a heavenly glow comes over their tear-stained faces. One word from the Gospel of the resurrection brings more comfort than many laudatory addresses at the grave. If we must praise at the grave, let us praise the grace of God who glorifies Himself in the redemption of sin-cursed men, and let us bring the joyous message: "Thy father, thy mother, thy brother shall rise again!"

V. Martha *enters* this door of hope.

But she enters it timidly. She had just said to Christ that whatsoever He would ask of God, God would give. That included the resurrection of Lazarus, if Christ were to ask it of the Father. But now that Jesus says, "Thy brother shall rise again," she does not, indeed, cast aside that promise in unbelief, but postpones the fulfillment of that promise to the distant future, by saying, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

We will not be severe with Martha.

We also will often in great distress exclaim in faith: God is omnipotent. Nothing is too wonderful for Him. With Him there is plenteous redemption, even from death. But when the Lord by His Word and Spirit confirms our faith with a Divine "Amen" in our soul, we hesitate to accept this affirmation and fail to wait patiently for the fulfilling of the promise.

The promise was too overwhelming for Martha.

Her mind was too small to grasp it.

Rise again.—Yes, Lazarus shall, but not now. At the last day with all the saints!

Does it not seem as if Martha's heart is beating in your own bosom?

Your heart is full of contradictions, even as hers. Today you have a joyous faith and cherish great thoughts of God and Christ. You walk through life with a holy smile of confidence. The

sun is shining in your heart. You are filled with happiness and overwhelming joy. Those are the Paradise days of faith. There is not a shadow of doubt about God's power, grace, and promises. You go your way singing, and are rich in the possession of the Lord's salvation.

That is Martha in you, exclaiming: "I know that whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give thee." But then the timid Martha comes who does not dare to say, "Amen!" on all the promises of God, and puts their fulfillment to the distant future. Even in those moments you hold fast to the promises, but you think they will be fulfilled later. You think it too marvellous to receive the promised blessings of grace, peace and comfort at once. You think yourself unworthy, and that the Lord will now try your faith, and later, yes, later, will grant you all that He has promised.

That is the timid, hesitating Martha in you. And how much time elapsed between Martha's joyous faith that expected everything of the Lord, and Martha's timid faith that withdrew its hand when the Lord stood ready to fill it? Not a year, a month, a week, a day, or even an hour. Just a moment. They were separated by but this one word of Jesus: "Thy brother shall rise again."

Isn't this your own experience?

One moment you rejoice in your God and Saviour, and the very next you doubt and walk through life with hanging head. Such painful

transitions from the heights to the depths are spared to almost no one. We no doubt need them to be kept from spiritual pride. But even so, let us hold fast to the promises of God, even when in the depths. Martha postponed the promise, but did not reject it. Lazarus would arise, but at the last day!

* * *

VI. Now the personal question remains: Have we the same faith to *follow Martha* when she enters the door of hope? Can we take that mighty testimony on our lips, and say: "I know that he shall arise at the last day?"

First of all, there is a last day.

If you listen to what the people of the world say, then you notice that they have cast aside all faith in a last day. They imagine that all things shall continue as we know them now. Mankind will doubtless come to still greater development. Succeeding generations will excell ours. But mankind will always exist without end.

Thank God, He has instructed us better in His Word. It would be a despairing thought to think that mankind will never come to a final consummation. Then mankind would be as a pilgrim who travels without any purpose. A traveler, who goes through the ages without a hope of ever arriving at a destination.

The Word of God teaches us that the history of mankind goes through a long series of days.

Each day in that series is a period of development. But finally the last day comes, to be followed by eternity. The history of mankind is not as a book without a closing chapter. It is not as a drama without a climax. The last day comes with the return of Christ on the clouds of heaven. That will be the copestone of history and will explain the enigma's of God's providence, and will bring the climax of the stirring story of mankind.

On that last day mankind will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. No one has ever seen mankind as a whole. While we live, we know but a small fraction of it. Many millions had died before we were born, and many other millions will be born after we die.

But finally the last child will be born.

The Divinely determined number is complete.

No one will be added to mankind in eternity. Then mankind, as a complete work of creation, will have to stand before God without one of the wellnigh countless millions being missing, for all must be judged to be rewarded according to what they have done in the flesh, be it good or evil.

Then all the dead must be raised from the graves, and that shall take place at the sound of the last trumpet. That is the resurrection at the last day, of which Martha spoke. May God be merciful to us, for it will be a resurrection for either a gruesome or glorious destiny.

Then listen reverently to the words of Jesus, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour cometh,

and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live."—They shall all live, but what a difference between them! "They shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." This is not a human testimony, but the testimony of Him who declared: "I am the way, the truth, and the life!"

One resurrection for all,—but two different destinies.

A resurrection to glory.

A resurrection to damnation.

The world will not believe in this denouement of history. It rejects the word of the Lord in its own wisdom which is foolishness to God.

How many do not dream of total annihilation! When you die, they say, you are buried, and all is past. Your body decays, and you have no soul to lose, any more than the beasts of the field. Only your remembrance remains. Your work survives you for a while, but it is utter foolishness to believe that you will ever again rise from the grave. The last word is annihilation.

Others dream that all men will be saved.

They are willing to believe in a resurrection. But that there should be an eternal damnation they will not accept. The sinners will repent after death. Even the devil, if there is a devil, will again become an angel of light. Then all crea-

tures will enjoy the blessedness of heaven. Not a soul will be lost.

Let not such vain imaginations lead you astray. Over against these empty speculations stands the faith of Martha: "I know that he shall arise at the last day." This faith is based on the Word of God. In it Christ speaks. Believe in the Lord Jesus who speaks of a resurrection unto life, and of a resurrection unto damnation. Seek life with Him, true spiritual life that refreshes and comforts your soul through fellowship with Him. Then you need not fear death. You can then look forward to the last day without terror, and wait for it with uplifted head. You cannot do this because you are holier in yourself than others, but because the truth of God has been engraved on your heart: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

AMEN

IV

IMMORTAL LIFE

> Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:
>
> And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?
>
> She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.
>
> —John 11:25-27.

I AM the resurrection and the life! This testimony of our Lord belongs to the great "I am's" of Jesus, which we find recorded in the gospel of John. In each one of these "I am's" Jesus tells us what He is for the world. In each statement He gives a different view of Himself, and reveals how He meets the most diverse needs of the human heart. No matter with what needs we may come to Him, He never disappoints us. You place your need before Him and He answers with a great: I am. I am just what you need.

I am the Good Shepherd. He says this to the sheep of His pasture. He feeds and leads His sheep even when they must go through the valley of the shadow of death.

I am the Light of the world. He says this to those who walk in darkness. He lets His light

shine on sin and guilt, on redemption and justification, on death and the grave, and coming judgment.

I am the door. He says this to all who would enter the Kingdom of grace.

There are many more such "I am's" in the gospel of John.

I am the bread of life. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the true vine.

And in our text we read, "I am the resurrection and the life." And then Jesus adds, "He that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth on me, shall never die."

It is the message of immortal life that Jesus brings. All life on earth is but brief. There are creatures that live but a day. But even if they live for a hundred years, what is that compared to eternity? The Bible is full of the transitoriness of life. It is a shadow, a dream, a tale that is told.

While we are still young we think the years of life to be many. We would even hasten on to the future. But when we have come to manhood and womanhood we realize the truth of the Psalmist's plaint: "we fly away!"

The thought brings despair. We yearn for immortality, for we have been created for eternity. Is there then no life to be found that is not subject to death? Yes, answers the Christ. There is such an immortal life, and it is found in me.

"He that liveth and believeth on me, shall never die!"

Christ brings us the message of immortal life. As we analyze this text we find that He speaks of Himself as the *Author* of this life. Then He *Describes* this life. Next He shows the *Way* to this life. And finally we will inquire whether the *Confession* of Martha in regard to this life has also become ours by grace.

* * *

I. Jesus presents Himself as the *Author* of immortal life when He says, "I am the resurrection and the life."

This statement contains two parts, but expresses one and the same truth. Jesus declares that in Him a life has been revealed over which death has no power. Had He but stated that He was the "life" He would not have mentioned that He Himself would also experience death. But He could not suppress that truth. His death meant too much than that He could be silent about it. For it would be a death of reconciliation to wipe away our sins. To make us realize this He puts His message into two parts, and at the same time proclaims His victory over death by saying, "I am the resurrection and the life."

I am the resurrection.

It is directly connected with the faith of Martha who said of Lazarus: "I know that he shall rise again at the last day." Martha thought of the

distant future. She did not dare to think of the present. Jesus corrects this by calling her back to the present. Jesus will not only be the resurrection in the future, but He is such now while standing in the presence of Martha: "I am the resurrection."

That is what Jesus was and still is.

The facts have proved it. Three times Jesus raised the dead. The daughter of Jairus,—a child. The son of the widow of Nain,—a young man. And Lazarus,—a fullgrown man. The lifegiving power of Jesus covers all ages, childhood, youth, and manhood.

But this is not the most important thing for us. More important than these resurrections is the resurrection of Christ Himself. He had declared to His disciples when He described Himself as the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep: "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it up again." By His resurrection He proved that He was the resurrection and the life.

He has become such for many. He still opens the graves. We are speaking, of course, of spiritual death. Your resurrection must begin where death begins, that is, in your soul. When Adam sinned he did not at once die physically, but lived for many centuries. Yet death reigned in his soul because he was separated from God, the source of life. If Christ is to be the resurrection for sinners, He must first be such for their soul.

He sends His Word and Spirit in the world to cry: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee!"

Many have been resurrected in this sense. A Samaritan woman, a Levi, a Paul, a Lydia, and a jailer in Philippi. And there is today a multitude for whom He has been the resurrection. And this inward resurrection is a pledge that their bodies shall one day be raised from the grave. The soul is more than the body. If your soul lives, your body shall live also, for Jesus has said: "This is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on Him, shall have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Jesus is also the life.

First He is the resurrection and then He is the life. In our spiritual resurrection we are born to a new life, and this life must grow. If Jesus did not nourish this life continually it would wither and die, but He daily pours out His grace into us.

We are not at once men and fathers in faith. When we are born again we are as little children. How partial is our knowledge of the truth! And as we grow older our consciousness of our sinfulness deepens, and our prayer life becomes more moderate. We also put our prayers under the sway of the Holy Ghost.

Gradually your faith becomes more firm, and the mists of doubt roll away. And as for your daily conduct, your walk on the path of holiness

is much more consistent. You have grown. You are better founded. You have advanced, even though you are but little satisfied with yourself. But you do not owe this to your own exertions. It is the resurrection power of Christ that makes your spiritual life to grow. Jesus Christ, who was your resurrection, is continually the fountain source of your life.

I am the resurrection and the life.

It means that Christ preserves you from all enemies. As a Pharaoh pursued the Israelites so Satan pursues you after you have been delivered from the Egypt of sin. What would become of you, were Christ not to make you by inward strength more than a victor? What would become of you were He not to keep His promise that no one shall snatch His sheep out of His hand or out of the hand of His Father, so that you cannot be lost forever? Praise God, Christ grants you not a partial, but a complete salvation.

This salvation is given by Christ. Have you appropriated it?

I am the resurrection, says Jesus.

The word resurrection supposes death. And now the question is whether you will place over-against the "I am" of Jesus another "I am" of your own? Will you confess: Yea, Lord Jesus, Thou art the resurrection, but I, I have fallen in sin; I am in the power of death"?

It is a humiliating confession.

You will never make it of your own accord.

You must first experience the work of grace. Through sin we have become proud. The unregenerated heart also has its "I am." It is the "I am" of Laodicea: "I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing!"

May God open their eyes!

When God lets the searching light of His Spirit enter your soul, my brother, your pride is at an end. You see yourself as leprous from head to foot. All your selfrighteousness glides from you as a cloak. You stand naked and revealed before the God who is too pure than that He can condone evil.

You must bow still deeper, however.

Jesus says that He is also the life. And now you must place over against that statement your confession: "I am dead in trespasses and sins."

O, but that is hard!

I am dead. Not what my earthly life is concerned, but dead towards God. By nature I am no man of prayer. I have no joy in God's Word. I have no delight in His service. I do not care about His will. I do not yearn for His fellowship. I live for my work, my home, my pleasures, my ideals. But God is a Stranger to me, a word, a sound, a name. I admit that I am in the midst of death, and if I am not changed I will be cast into the second death, eternal death.

Can you by grace make that confession?

Then not only confess your spiritual poverty and death, but flee to Christ who has what you

lack, and is what you are not. Believingly accept Him who stands before you with the message: "I am the resurrection and the life!"

He is the resurrection from all death.

You cannot have fallen so low, but He is able to raise you up. Cling to Him in faith that He can and will save. He will draw you up out of the misery of sin and translate you from the realm of death into the realm of life. And then you are under the care of Christ who guides you in the way. Then you enjoy a life of salvation, peace, and holiness. Now it is still hid with Christ in God. But it shall be revealed when Christ comes on the clouds and opens the graves with His voice of power: "I am the resurrection and the life!"

* * *

II. How does Jesus now *describe* this immortal life?

In our text He does not portray it in its essence and glory as an eternal joy into which He shall one day lead His faithful servants, but only describes how we can get that life, and what it means for the dead and the living both.

He first speaks of those that have died. Martha has recently lost her brother, and it shows fine tact on the part of Jesus to begin with them that rest in the grave. He had already comforted her by drawing her attention from her dead brother to Himself when He said: "I am the resurrection and the life." In the same breath He continues

to place His departed friend in the full light of this testimony by adding: "Whosoever believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

Jesus is speaking of the believing dead to whom Lazarus belonged. We may apply this truth to them whom we have laid aside to rest in the darkness of the grave if they were the possession of Jesus, and died in the hope of salvation. When we speak of them we usually call them dead. It would be wrong to condemn this. For we mean that they are no longer in the sphere of this earthly life. They are separated from us, and it would be hyper-spirituality to speak of them as though alive.

Yet what does Jesus teach? He declares: "He that believeth in me, though he die, yet shall he live." The dead live. They live in another and higher world. Though their bodies have died and have returned to dust, they live as to their souls unto God and Christ. Their life is more real than that of the sin-and-sorrow-burdened inhabitants of the earth. They live a joyous life without care, weariness or pain. They live in heaven with the angels and saints, and this full, rich, deep life is so unclouded that they rejoice before the throne of God.

But this is not all.

Jesus also has a promise for the body. He does not say that whosoever believes in Him shall live as to his soul in heaven. He uses the future tense, and thereby refers at the same time to their

glorious, bodily resurrection from the grave. "He that believeth in me, though he die, yet shall he live." Immortal life is also promised for the body. On the last day we shall receive our bodies back again as we have had them on earth, but then they will be glorified and redeemed from all weaknesses and limitations. Christ is not half a Saviour. His saving work includes both body and soul. The believing dead will be restored to us, and we will walk with them on the new earth where there will be no more separation. Immortal life is the portion of all believers, and it will eternally be nourished by Him Who stands as the true Tree of Life in the paradise of God.

Christ not only has a promise for those who died.

He also has one for those who are still on earth.

For He adds: "and whosoever liveth, and believeth on me, shall never die." This promise must at first have sounded just as strange to Martha as to us. For it is in complete contradiction to the facts of daily life, if we give it but a superficial glance. Whosoever liveth and believeth in Christ,—what is his lot here on earth? And your answer will be: The same as that of others who do not believe in Christ. He is on the way to the grave. The sharp sickle of the great Mower does not spare the believers on the grainfield of human kind. We all go to our eternal home, and we often

see that the pious are taken away before the godless.

These are the hard facts, the raw reality.

How can Christ then say that the believers shall never die?

The explanation is that the believers will never have to taste death in its fullness. They do, indeed, become sick and die. They also are carried to the grave. They are mourned, and their names are erased from the census rolls of the living. And yet death in its reality and awfulness is not theirs. For death in its awful reality is not the separation of soul and body, but is eternal damnation, which is the punishment of sin, and of which the dissolution of the body is but the beginning. Christ suffered this death for His saints when He cried on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" The believers will not experience that fearful death. Death is not for them a sinking into the outer darkness, but an entrance through a narrow passage into eternal light. And therefore Christ says of them, "Whosoever liveth, and believeth on me, shall *never* die." Death is for them an ascension to Zion's heavenly habitations on the hill of God's loneliness.

* * *

III. In what *Way* can we enter immortal life?

It is the way of faith, says Jesus. Twice He mentions that way. First He says that he that believeth in Him shall live, even though he were

dead, and then, that whosoever liveth, and believeth in Him, shall never die.

The unbelievers are also immortal according to the Word of God. Men have dreamed of a conditional immortality, according to which view only the believers will live forever, while the unbelievers would be destroyed as the beasts of the field, of which, at death, only a handful of dust remains. But Scripture teaches that all men are immortal, godly and godless both. But their existence on the other side of the grave will be wholly different. Over against the eternal joy of the pious Scripture plainly places the eternal punishment of the damned. In our text, however, Jesus only refers to an eternal and blessed life. And that is your future only if you are a believer in Christ, and then in that Christ who is portrayed in the Word of God as the mediator of God and man.

Everything that is recorded of Christ, both in the Old and New Testament, has as its purpose to open your eyes for the fact that Jesus has earned eternal, blessed life for guilty sinners. When we speak of guilty sinners this is not arbitrary. The Word of God plainly teaches, and if you are saved your own conscience affirms, that by sin you are worthy of death. Do not minimize your sin. You are no more to do that than you may minimize God's grace. Do not turn your sin into an imperfection or moral weakness for which you are hardly responsible. Call your sin by name, even though it condemns you. Holy Writ

calls your sin transgression, for which you are accountable to the Judge of the whole earth. The Great Judge has decreed eternal death as punishment for transgression. He announced this doom to our first parents when He declared that in the day that they ate of the forbidden fruit they would surely die. Indeed, all sinners are under the awful doom of eternal death.

Is God so severe? Does He only speak of justice?

No. He is also merciful and gracious, great in mercy and truth.

Instead of heartlessly leaving you in the bands of death, He has sent His Only Begotten Son into the world to redeem you from this fearful death, and give you eternal life. For that purpose Jesus has walked, taught, and suffered in our frail flesh. For that purpose He was beaten with stripes, and mocked. For that purpose He drained for His saints the cup of God's wrath. He left not a single drop for you to drink, for He arose from the grave to prove that all death was now past for Him.

Past for Him. And also for you, if you believe in Him. Whosoever beleiveth on the Son hath eternal life, but he that is disobedient to the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him, and with that wrath, eternal death.

Believest thou this? Such was the question of Jesus to Martha.

He also asks every one of you that question. Do you believe that His death is the fountain

of your eternal salvation? Do you place your trust and hope in the face of eternity only on His Mediatorial merits, and not on your own righteousness? As long as you pass Christ by you must fear death and the grave, for every day brings you nearer to your doom.

But if you are implanted in Christ by a true faith, God grants you songs in the night of death, and dying you still sing of immortality. The promise is fulfilled in you: "He that believeth in me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die!"

* * *

IV. And now we wish to have a word on the *confession* of faith in life eternal.

Faith and confession belong together. Paul says, "with the heart we believe to justification, and with the mouth we confess to salvation."

No one can always keep his firm conviction hid. You might as well try to seal a fountain. But true as this may be, we are not always equally bold to confess. Faith sometimes has such overwhelming truths as its object that we hesitate to proclaim our faith boldly. Neither for Martha, nor for us, is it an easy matter to confess clearly and boldly that we shall never die, if we believe in Christ with the whole heart. At least, Martha does not seem to have come to her confession at once. The Lord understood, and helped, and drew from her the confession by asking: "Believest thou this?"

Now that she begins to speak her answer is beautiful. "Yea, Lord; I have believed that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, even He that cometh into the world." She was a true Israelite who knew the prophecies concerning the great Son of David, of whom the ancient people so gladly sang: "Blessed be the great King who cometh to us in the Name of the Lord!" With her "Yea, Lord," Martha confesses her faith, that He that was to come, had come in Christ. She goes a step further, and confesses Him as the Son of God, for only One Who is more than man has power over death and the grave.

It was a marvellous confession.

And yet it was nothing more than agreeing with mind and heart with the testimony that Christ had given of Himself. For Martha only says "Yea, Lord," in answer to the question of Jesus whether she believed that He was what He claimed to be, the resurrection and the life, and would do what He had promised, namely, keep all His saints from eternal death, and give them eternal life.

In that "Yea, Lord" lies the whole secret of faith.

Books have been written to explain the nature of faith. But the heaviest tomes have less value than a simple statement of Martha. She does not give any heavy definition of faith and unbelief, but for her true faith is a "Yea, Lord" on all the promises of God, which He has revealed in His

Word, while unbelief is nothing else than a firm "no" to these same promises.

Examine yourself with this test.

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came into our flesh to reconcile a lost world to God through His blood? No, answers unbelief. He was a man of like passions as we. Nobler than we. Greater than we. Wiser than we. But in essence like unto us. But faith bends the knee and falls before Christ with a "Yea, Lord!" Then you take the words of Thomas on your lips, and say reverently: "My Lord, and my God!"

Do you next believe that Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life for all His redeemed, so that they travel as immortals through this mortal life, and shall one day, also as to their bodies, inherit the earth? No, answers unbelief. That is impossible. All paths lead to the grave. No one arises from the grave. Death ends all. But faith gives the joyous answer: Yea, Lord,—we *behold* a grave, we *behold* a coffin, we *behold* a tombstone, but we *believe* in the resurrection of the body and life eternal!

What is your personal opinion of these things?

You must decide between the "yea" of faith and the "no" of unbelief. One or the other is your confession. You cannot waver between the two and today say, "Yea," and tomorrow say, "no." That would be doubt, and a doubting heart never

has rest. It is as unstable as the waves of the sea. Then you will never have peace.

The Lord does not demand that your "yea" be at once strong and determined. Let it be hesitating and weak at first, God does not despise the day of small things. He spares the bruised reed and the smoking flax. God listens intently. He hears the whispered "yea" of faith. But then He will lead you on, that your faith may be manly and strong. Has He not taught Martha many years to purify and strengthen her love and faith? She first sought it the wrong way. She thought that she must ever be busy for her Lord. But in our text we see that Jesus has taught her that quiet confidence in Him, and accepting His Word, is the better part.

He would also teach you to say more and more firmly: "Yea, Lord."

He calls you a sinner, a lost sinner. Do you say, "Yea, Lord"?

He calls you to come with your guilt. Do you say, "Yea, Lord"?

He wants you to kneel at the foot of the cross. Do you say, "Yea, Lord"?

And, finally, He asks you if you believe that He is your Redeemer from death and hell. Do you say, "Yea, Lord, I believe!"?

AMEN

V

A SYMPATHETIC HIGH PRIEST

And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee.

As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him.

Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him.

The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there.

Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled,

And said, Where have ye laid him? They say unto him, Lord, come and see.

Jesus wept.

Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!

And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?

—John 11:28-37.

ON a previous occasion we have seen how Jesus comforted Martha. For the time being it seemed that Mary was forgotten. Of course, Jesus wished to comfort Mary and Martha

both, but there was such a difference in the character of the sisters that He preferred to speak to them separately. Mary had so often let herself be taught by Jesus that she had a deeper insight into His nature than Martha. She did not need such lengthy instruction now. Therefore God in His providence had guided Martha to Jesus first. She had hastened to Him when she heard that He was near the village. This haste was the result of her lively temperament, but God used this temperament to bring her to Jesus.

Now it is time for Mary to come. Jesus had not forgotten her. John tells us: "but Mary still sat in the house." This reveals Mary's character. It fitted her meditative nature to remain quietly in the house to ponder her loss.

But we may not always remain in the home in sorrow. Jesus sends Martha to call Mary. He here reveals Himself to us as the sympathetic High Priest who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities and sorrow.

When you read the New Testament you constantly see some new aspect of Christ. You see Him as the pleading Saviour who calls the weary and heavy laden to Him to find peace for their souls. You see Him as the seeking Saviour, who leaves the ninety and nine sheep in the wilderness to seek the one sheep that was lost. You see Him as the suffering Saviour who dies on the cross to redeem the world of sin, curse and death. And in our text you see Him as the sympathetic Saviour.

In preaching on a subject as this there is danger of more or less sentimentalism. That may not be. The purpose of preaching must always be to strengthen faith rather than to evoke emotions. If we analyze our text we will be kept from sentimentalism, and we will rejoice in our sympathetic High Priest, and in His message. In our text we find Him calling Mary, Mary going to Him, and falling at His feet. Then we see Him deeply moved, even weeping, and finally hear the different opinions of the Jews.

As we thus see our Saviour may we also hearken to His call and be able to say: "Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need."

* * *

I. Let us first consider Christ's *call* of Mary.

When Martha had heard that Jesus was coming she had neglected to tell Mary. Mary was therefore still at home in the company of the many Jews who brought the calls of condolence. It was therefore a great surprise for Mary to see Martha suddenly enter the home and whisper in her ear: "The Teacher is here, and calleth thee!"

She called her secretly, we read.

Mary must try to escape her callers. Martha wishes her to meet Jesus in private. She herself had received such comforting words, when alone with Jesus, that she wishes Mary to have the same

blessing. So she says secretly: "The Teacher is here, and calleth thee."

Martha did not succeed in keeping the Jews from being present at the meeting of Jesus and Mary, as we learn from the following verses. Yet she was a faithful servant of her Lord. She brought the message entrusted to her with wisdom and fervor, and thereby takes an honorable place among the preachers of the Gospel. For what else do these do than bring the call of the Lord to the people, warning, pleading, and inviting them with the words: "The Master is come and calleth for thee!"?

Jesus is a pleading Saviour. He stretches out His arms to sinners saying: "Come unto Me all that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." But in addition the call of Christ comes especially to those who are broken by sorrow because they have lost what was most precious to them here on earth. That sorrow is spared no one. No matter how long we may live together as husband and wife with our children; no matter what happy laughter may ring through our homes; sooner or later sorrow knocks at our door; we must let death in to take away one of our dear ones.

Then we remain in the house as a Mary of Bethany.

Many visitors may come, but they cannot bring real comfort.

It seems that Mary let the comforting words

of the Jews pass by in silence. But when she hears Martha say: "The Teacher is here, and calleth thee," she can no longer sit still. She hurries to Jesus.

But Christ has not only ordained this comfort for Mary.

If we would but consider His message with our hearts!

A voice calls from every sickbed, from every deathbed, and from every grave in which we have laid aside our dear ones. It is the voice of Jesus to comfort them that mourn: "The Teacher is here, and calleth thee."

Be a Martha in the sorrow-stricken homes.

Be a messenger of good tidings.

When the tear-dimmed eyes see naught but the coffin, then say: "The Teacher is here, and calleth thee!" Probably you have disdained that voice till now. But in days of sorrow it comes with poignant earnestness. Your soul is never more open for Christ than in days when you have lost all. Christ not only wants to comfort. He also wants to meet the deepest needs of your soul. He has many ways of approach, but He most often chooses the way of the cross. He sends his Martha's in advance with the words: "The Teacher is here, and calleth thee!"

* * *

II. Let us now consider Mary *going* to Jesus.

Mary was stirred to the depths of her being. We know this from the fact that she arose quickly.

She forgets the Jews. All must step aside for Jesus. Without a moment's delay she hurries to her Lord.

This is the obedience of faith. We may ignore the general invitation of the Gospel for many years, but when it becomes personal by the application of the Holy Spirit, we hearken. When we hear: The Master calleth *thee,* with the accent on the *thee,* then we can no longer delay. You leave all behind to obey the magical call of Christ. That is the obedience of faith.

The Jews present do not understand what has happened. But when they see Mary hasten out of the home they conclude that she is going to the grave to weep there, and they go out to comfort her.

To the grave to weep!

It was a ready surmise. The thought is taken from life. Hundreds and thousands make a pilgrimage to the graves of their dear ones to weep. Especially when the bereavement has been recent. They wish to tarry again on the place where so much that is dear lies buried. It seems to them, almost, as if they are standing on hallowed ground. This is no idle sham. For where can they think better of their dear ones who died, than in the cemetery?

To the grave to weep!

We can understand it. Our feelings have their just demands. But better than our feelings is our faith. Our feelings draw us to the mortal remains

buried in the grave. But our faith does not look at the dark grave; it looks up to the heavens of glory where all is brilliant with uncreated light. Our faith knows that those who have fallen asleep in Jesus are not resting in the grave, but in the Father's house where many mansions are. Our feelings cause us to look down. Faith causes us to look up, where Christ is with all the saints. Faith does not idolize the grave or monumental stones, but seeks its dear ones in glory.

The Jews were mistaken. Mary was not on the way to the grave, but on the way to Jesus, who is the Resurrection and the Life. With Him she found comfort.

* * *

III. John next describes the *meeting* of Mary and Jesus.

He does not mention whether Martha accompanied her, but we do not doubt it. John wishes to isolate Mary for a moment to show us how she poured out her grief to Christ, and how graciously Christ comforted her.

As soon as Mary sees Jesus she hurries to him and falls down at His feet. She cannot say much. In a voice broken with sobs she says: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." She repeats the words of Martha. It shows that both had but one thought in those days of grief. Again and again they had said to each other: "If Jesus had been here, death would have passed us

by." But Martha had the vigor of faith to add: "But even now I know that, whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give thee." Mary is so overwhelmed with grief that all her hope is clouded. She can but say: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

A believing Mary can sometimes be mistaken.

Yet her words express a truth established by experience. There is much misery and need, much sickness and death, that would *not* be, if Jesus were present. You come into the home of a drunkard. You see empty rooms, bare walls, broken furniture, a weeping mother, and terrified children. "Lord, if thou hadst been here, this would be a home of love and peace."

You stand at the coffin of a man who lost everything in a game of chance, and then in despair committed suicide. "Lord, if thou hadst been here, this wretched man would not have taken his own life!"

You visit fallen women, and men who decay from sexual diseases. "Lord, if thou hadst been here, they would have remembered Thy word: 'Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God!' "

Mary uttered a great truth.

But it was not of application in her case.

Lazarus had not died because Jesus was not present, but because in the providence of God his death was to be to the glory of Christ.

Do not analyze the sigh of a sorrowing soul, however.

Do not condemn a woman as unbelieving because she is overwhelmed with grief. Jesus does not reprove her. He saw her mistake, but he knew that it came from affection for her brother, and therefore condones her complaint at God's providential dealing. Her love made her err, and her error showed how high she regarded Christ, for she believed Him to have power over all illness.

We will not criticize Mary.

She may err in speech, but her attitude reveals faith. For she fell at the feet of Jesus. And whoever goes with his grief to Jesus has more faith than the person who expresses his grief in loud wailing, or suppresses it with compressed lips.

At the feet of Jesus,—Mary felt at home there.

There she sat when Jesus visited her home, while Martha was busy with serving. And when Mary later anoints Jesus as a preparation for His burial she pours out the precious ointment on the feet of Him who had brought peace to her soul, and had published peace and salvation. She loved that place. There she became small and Jesus became great. And whoever is accustomed to be at the feet of Jesus in days of prosperity, will not seek that place in vain in days of sorrow.

At the feet of Jesus,—That is the place fitting for us all.

At the feet of Jesus,—as poor sinners to hear His word of grace, and be renewed by His Spirit.

At the feet of Jesus,—with all the cares and sorrows of life.

* * *

IV. But let us now consider Jesus. In our text we see that He is *deeply moved.*

The Jews weep. Mary and Martha weep. And Jesus weeps, the sympathizing Jesus.

We read: "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping who came with her, he *groaned* in the spirit, and was troubled."

But those words not only speak of the grief of Jesus. The original shows that something else is meant as well. Elsewhere the word translated as groaned is used for indignation or anger. Jesus feels Himself to be in a rebellion that wellnigh overmasters Him. He conquers His feelings, however, though they are plainly visible on His face. For we read literally: Jesus troubled Himself. He remained the master of His own passions.

What may it have been that so troubled Jesus inwardly?

He sees the weeping Mary and the weeping Jews. They weep over Lazarus. But for the mind of Jesus this sorrow, and this single grave, is but a small fragment of a universal sorrow that casts its dark cloak over all human kind. In this one example Jesus sees a hostile power loom up before

Him. That hostile power is death that should never have entered the world. And behind death He sees the terrible power of sin, for death is the wages of sin. And behind sin He sees the realm and prince of darkness by whom sin was brought into the world. Are you surprised that His every nerve rebels against these destructive forces? But His anger is not futile anger. He is come into the world to break the works of darkness. He therefore restrains Himself and sets Himself to rob the enemy of his prey. He is going to the grave. He shall make a victorious attack. He therefore asks: "Where have ye laid him?" And then He goes forth to reveal His conquering power.

That is a message of comfort for you also when you lose one of your dear ones. Your tears will be less bitter if you keep the victorious Christ in mind. Christ does not want you to stand at the grave of your dear ones without shedding a tear. But He wants to sanctify your sorrow by restraining it, and shedding over it the light of His comfort.

The weeping Mary is more dear to Him than the hard hearted man who steels himself against grief instead of expressing it in blessed tears. Not all tears are blessed. There are tears of chagrin, as those of Esau, after he had lost God's blessing and found no place of repentance. There are also tears of despair, as those of Cain, who wailed, "My sin is too great than that it can be forgiven!" or those of a Judas who hanged himself and

screeched: "I have betrayed innocent blood!" Such tears fall as fiery drops on the conscience of the sinner and bring no respite. But the tears of Mary are a boon for the soul. You often hear grief stricken people say: "Could I but cry!" Indeed in days of sorrow tears are a grace-gift of God. When you lose a dear one be not ashamed of your tears, but thank God that you can cry. Tear dimmed eyes will see the glory of God even in the grave.

* * *

V. Let us now consider Jesus *weeping.*

The tears of Mary and the Jews had not left Him unmoved. He therefore asks: "Where have ye laid him?" Jesus was now to attack death. But the question also spoke of a sympathy that refreshed Mary.

The place where we bury our dead has something sacred about it, even though we do not sprinkle it with holy water. And then we are refreshed when a friend asks: "Where have you laid him?" Such a question reveals sympathetic feeling. We breathe easier when someone else is willing to pause a moment at the grave of a dear one.

But here it is *Jesus* who asks the question.

Do you realize what it means that Jesus remembers our dead?

We often think of them as forgotten in the cemetery over which the storms howl and the

rains descend. The cemeteries are always being enlarged. Sometimes it is difficult to find the graves of our departed relatives. And though faith conquers these things we still are depressed. But God is a God of the dead, also in this sense, that He watches over them. The footsteps of the Lord go over all the earth: on the sea, on the hills, in the home, at the wedding of Cana, at a deathbed, and also on the cemetery. Whoever may forget our dead, God does not. He is interested in the graves, as witness the question: "Where have ye laid him?"

And how did Jesus then stand at the grave?

John tells us in the expressive words: "Jesus wept."

More than once during His earthly ministry Jesus wept. When He entered Jerusalem from Mount Olivet He wept over the unbelief of its inhabitants, even though they were ready to welcome Him with Hosanna's. But according to the original word there, that weeping was a heartbroken sobbing. At the grave of Lazarus His weeping is calmer, however. His eyes were filled with tears because of the grieving sisters, and the unbelief of the Jews. He mingled His tears with theirs to teach them and us, that we have a sympathetic High Priest who is afflicted in all our afflictions.

Jesus wept.

What immeasurable comfort those words bring!

In grief people often think that no one understands them and sympathizes with them. Not everyone has even a circle of sympathetic friends as Martha and Mary had in the Jews. Everything is so lonely and forsaken. The home is empty, the world is empty, the heart is empty. But then you must not forget that there is *One* who understands. He is the sympathetic High Priest, who is indeed in heaven, but who sends His Spirit and grace in your heart to comfort you in your loneliness. You are not alone in your sorrow. Jesus is there. Lonely sorrow crushes. But sorrow with Jesus lifts up. If you are to experience that comfort you must not only weep over your dead, but also over your sins and flee with them to Christ. Then you will experience the power of the words of Jesus: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Comforted, first in their sorrow for sin, and then in their sorrow for their loss.

* * *

VI. And what was the *judgment* of the Jews on the weeping of Jesus?

Jesus' weeping made a deep impression on all. But they are not all agreed in their explanation. Most of them saw in Christ's tears a proof of His love for Lazarus, and they say to each other: "Behold how He loved him!"

They were not mistaken. Jesus did love Lazarus. You may object that Jesus knew He would

raise Lazarus and that therefore He has no reason to weep over the loss of His friend. But then you belittle His human sympathy. He has become like unto the brethren in every respect, save sin. And if this is taken in its full sense then the departure of Lazarus must have deeply moved Him. Praise God, we have no Saviour with a heart of stone. It is a comfort for us to know that He shared our sorrow when tears of love coursed down His face. Now we know that His heart beats for us in heaven, and that He does not despise our tears, but understands them because He also wept at the grave of Lazarus.

Behold how He loved him!

That is the finest testimony men can give of you when you are laid aside in the grave. Men often speak of the dead at a funeral. But if they then can speak of the grace of God shown in a man's life; of the power he received to bear his cross; of the joy that was his in affliction, and of the psalms he sang in the night; of the trusting faith that marked his end when he entered the valley of shadows with the name of Jesus on his lips; then we are overwhelmed with the riches of God's grace, and we whisper at the grave: "Behold how He loved him!"

God grant that this may be said of you when you are placed in your last narrow dwelling. Whatever men may be able to say of your consecration to your home and task, of your generosity to the needy, and of the greatness of your mind

and heart, it is nothing compared to the testimony that Jesus Christ was your one and all. All other praise loses its glory before the words that glorify Jesus: "Behold how He loved him!"

Seek to know and experience that love. It is a seeking love that follows you everywhere, and leads you in the right way. It is a gracious love that urged our Saviour to shed His blood for you. It is a faithful and unchangeable love that sustains you in all temptations, and leads you safely through death and the grave to the Father's house.

Not one of you is beyond the reach of that redeeming love. Probably you have long despised that love and requited it with ingratitude. You probably deem yourself totally unworthy of such love after resisting it so long. O, my brother, no one is worthy of that love, for we are all alike, when Jesus finds us. He does not accept the person of man. And on the tombstone of the most guilty the glorious testimony can be engraved: "Behold how He loved him!"

That was the first and best judgment of the Jews.

Next to that you find the judgment of those who were less favorable to Jesus. When they see the weeping Jesus they remark tauntingly: "Could not this man, who opened the eyes of him that was blind, have caused that this man also should not die?" They evidently knew the story of the healing of the blind man recorded in the ninth chapter. Could not he, who restored sight,

have healed the sickness of Lazarus? They are puzzled. They wonder if the power of Jesus is limited, and if not, why could He do one miracle and not another?

Let that question never enter your mind, beloved!

How ashamed those critics must have been when Jesus called Lazarus from the grave, and wrought a greater miracle than a miracle of healing, which they deemed beyond His power? The Lord is able to open the eyes of the blind, also of the spiritually blind; to heal the sick, and even raise the dead, but He does it in His own good time. We may not say when, however. We are servants, not lords. Instead of criticizing God's deeds we do better by fleeing to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to be helped, not in our time, but in time of need. God's help never comes too late. But it surely comes to all who wait for Him, and then it will come with such fulness that they will say: "The half has not been told!"

AMEN

VI

THE GLORY OF GOD

Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.

Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.

And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

—John 11:38-44.

WE have now come to our last discourse on the resurrection of Lazarus. The climax of the story is approaching. In a few moments Jesus will reveal Himself as the Victor of death and the grave. In connection with this

we chose Ps. 89 for Scripture reading. There we find a prophetic picture of our Saviour as Conquerer. We read there: "I have laid help upon One that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people."

These words reveal the heroic side of Christ, an aspect of His person that seems to be forgotten in our day.

We know Christ as the meek and lowly, the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And surely, the great Sufferer brings comfort to our hearts, for God has laid all our iniquities on Him.

There seems to be nothing heroic in the suffering Christ.

And yet He is a Hero as the world has never seen or shall see. He alone bore for us the burden of our transgressions. He has conquered the realm of darkness to make us the children of light. He has fought the king of terrors to break the power of death and bring life and immortality to light.

Our text presents Christ as such a Victor. He stands at the grave of Lazarus and reveals the glory of God. As we analyze these verses we read of His approach to the grave, His standing at the grave, and of the glory of God that He casts into the grave. Then we read of His thanksgiving to the Father, and His command: "Lazarus, come forth," and Lazarus comes forth swathed in grave clothes.

I. John first tells us of the *approach* of Jesus to the grave.

Jesus had gone to the grave with Mary and Martha and the many Jews who had come to express their sympathy. "Where have you laid him?" Jesus had asked. There was then no common cemetery in Bethany, where all the dead were buried. God's ancient people desired to have their own private burial place in their own garden. These graves would be sealed with a heavy stone to protect the bodies from the ravages of the ever present jackals.

The graves were not always safe from the jackals, however. The more-well-to-do would therefore have a tomb hewn out of rock, as we know from the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. These tombs would often be found along the public highway. They were of different kinds. Some, like our graves, dug into the earth. Others, large and roomy, where there were shelves for many bodies.

These tombs would be whitened in the spring to make them plainly visible. The grave spoke of death, and death spoke of sin, and sin not only brings guilt, but also pollution. To keep the Israelite from possible pollution the graves had to be visible from afar.

No one would ever seek refuge in a tomb unless he were of unsound mind as the demoniac of Gadara.

How must we picture the grave of Lazarus?

We do not know the details, but the impression is that it was a large tomb. To this tomb Jesus now goes. He does not approach it as we often do, just to view the grave or stand helplessly by| He comes with power. John tells us again, as He did in verse thirty-three, that Jesus was stirred to the depths of His being in holy anger against death which destroys the best and dearest on earth. Jesus is come, not to weep at the grave, but to attack death, and place His foot on the neck of death as a Victor.

Do you realize what a comfort it is to have Jesus approach the grave?

You can visit the graves of your dear ones in two ways.

If you go alone without the victorious Christ, you can but stand at the grave and weep. All that you loved lies buried there. Your past was one of joy. In your home happy laughter resounded. Your sky was cloudless, and you enjoyed the love and care of your dear ones. And now all that is past. The days of sunshine are buried.

If you stand alone at the grave you see naught but destruction, wrought by the king of terrors and the terror of kings. But how different things are if, as Mary and Martha, you can stand at the grave with Christ. With His grace in your soul. With His peace in your heart. With His light in your eye. Then you not only see a buried past, but also a hopeful future. For Christ is Victor over the grave. The last, the very last word is

not death and the grave, but the resurrection and life eternal.

* * *

II. Let us now hear Christ's *command* to open the grave.

Jesus shall restore Lazarus to his sisters. It is an anxious moment. All eyes are upon Christ. And He commands: "Take ye away the stone."

He does not say this to Mary and Martha. They were too weak, as we know from the question of the women on the way to the grave of Jesus: "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the tomb?"

Jesus calls to the men present. Of course, He did not need their help. He could have removed the stone with a single word. But He does not speak a word of power. Nor does He pray that some angel from heaven may come to remove the stone. He wants to use human beings to realize His great plan. They cannot bring a spark of life into Lazarus. That is His Divine privilege. But they can serve Him in His great work, and He will gladly use their service, witness His command: "Take away the stone."

Let us consider that thought for a moment.

It can be applied to God's work of grace in the world. He is the Almighty God who does not ask our service as though He needed anything. And in the realm of nature He sets all human help aside. He alone created heaven and earth. He commanded and it stood fast. He does not use

human hands to guide the stars, and He alone directs the wind and lightning. No one can serve Him there.

But how is it in the moral world?

When God fulfills His counsel in the lives of men, He uses human aid. He wishes to save Noah and his family from the flood. He might have lifted them up above the storm. But instead He commands him to build an ark to the saving of his house and thus be a co-worker with God.

When Paul's life is threatened in Damascus and a watch is set at the gates to take him prisoner, God could have delivered him miraculously. But instead He uses human help which lets the apostle down the wall in a basket to escape death.

God does not need us,—never.

But He will use us, as when Jesus commanded: "Take away the stone." That was all the men present could do. But God commands that that be done.

When God raises men from spiritual death He uses the same method. No man can raise a sinner from sin. No preacher, no teacher, no pious parent. But they can take away the stone. They can use the means God gave them to remove obstacles.

God nearly always makes use of means.

Take away the stone. That means for us when we stand before the spiritually dead that we preach the Word, bring the gospel, and rear our children in the fear of God. Take away the doubts of your children. Try to remove their difficulties,

and be a co-worker with God even though you cannot give them life eternal.

Take away the stone. We can not do much. What we do seems insignificant. But God unites His mighty power with our insignificant labor. When weak human hands have removed the stone, the Christ cries: "Lazarus, come forth!"

* * *

III. We will now see the GLORY of God revealed.

No sooner has Christ commanded to remove the stone, but Martha cries: "Lord, by this time the body decayeth; for he hath been dead four days."

There was anguish in this cry of Martha.

"Do not open the grave!" The thought is unbearable to her, that she, or Jesus should see Lazarus in a state of decay. Her feelings rebel at the thought. She does not realize that her cry came from unbelief. Just a few moments before she had said: "And even now I know that, whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give thee." Where is her faith now? Christ is about to fulfill her hope, and she blocks his path. It is amazing how close faith and unbelief dwell together in the same person. One moment we exult: "God can do all!" And the next we would limit His power.

But God is not checked in His work of grace. When He shall work no loving Martha can check Him. Christ quietly reproves her unbelief by saying: "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou believest, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"

Christ reminds her of what He had said shortly before when He declared that He was the resurrection and the life, and that any one who believed in Him, though he were dead, would live, while whosoever lived and believed in Him would never die. The glory of God would shine forth in the resurrection of Lazarus. In that resurrection Martha would see the power, the faithfulness, the grace, and the wisdom of God, in a word, the glory of God.

She would not see that glory when she got to heaven where it shines in full splendor, nor would she see it in the living church, nor in her own heart, but in a place where she never expected it, namely, in the grave.

Light Divine in the darkness of the grave.

Martha's unbelief made her say: when that grave is opened, I will see a decaying body.

Christ declares the very opposite: if thou believest, Martha, thou shalt not see decay, but the glory of God.

Christ kept this promise for Martha in an unusual way when He raised Lazarus from the grave. But the question is whether we cannot benefit from those words when we are standing at the grave of our dear ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus. Martha spoke of "seeing," and Jesus spoke of "seeing." But it makes a vast difference whether you are looking in the graves of your dear ones only with your bodily eye, or

whether you are also looking with the eye of faith.

If you look but with the eye of the body you must make Martha's cry your own, and say in a choking voice: "the body decayeth!"

But then look with the eye of faith. Do you not see a heavenly gleam play in the darkness of the grave? A beam from Jerusalem above, where the soul of your dear one has gone to be clothed with the white robe of victory? And does not your heart begin to sing when you find, instead of decay, a ray of the glory of God?

It all depends on your eyes.

Have you only bodily eyes?

Or have you also the eye of faith?

It may be that you are not without faith, but that you close the eye of faith when standing at the grave, so that you must miss all comfort. Who, who has any knowledge of his own soul, would give you a bitter reproof because of this? Our hearts are often tossing between belief and unbelief, especially in days of grief. Only the Lord dares to reprove you over your doubts when you have for the moment forgotten His promises: "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou believest, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"

"Said I not unto thee." Write these words on your heart.

Not only must you sometimes stand at a grave where all God's promises seem to fail, but in this life you are so often in circumstances from which

there seems to be no deliverance. And then you are prone to think that God's power is limited. But then the Lord makes you ashamed by saying: "Said I not to thee" that with God there are deliverances even from death, and that His arm is not shortened?

Let unbelief therefore never take root in your heart.

With man much is impossible.

With God all things are possible.

We often forget God's promises. If we would remember His promises we would see His glory in homes and hearts where we least expect it. God has said that He has no delight in the death of the sinner, and, alas, how often we forget that word of Divine love when we see a man sinking down in the grave of sin. Why should we think that in this case God's arm is shortened?

Though a sinner should sink down so low that all men say that he is forever lost, cast aside that thought, and no longer minimize the power of God's grace. If God so decrees, that sinner shall rejoice before the Throne, and God will ask you, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou believedst, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"

* * *

IV. Let us now consider the *thanksgiving* of Jesus.

The stone has been rolled from the grave. The tomb lies open before Jesus, the sisters, and the

Jews. The eyes of all are upon the dark cavern, and all are in suspense, awaiting what will happen next. Christ alone is an exception. He does not look into the dark grave, but we read of Him: "And Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, Father, I thank Thee!"

What a lesson we find here for our prayer life!

When you are praying to your Father in heaven you must not keep your eyes on the things round about you. Then you will but be anxious. There are so many things that seem to make it impossible to have your petition granted. Nor must you look within your own heart. Then you will but see your own unworthiness which makes you doubt whether you may expect to have your prayers heard. But you must look up. Then you will see God clothed with power, for Whom nothing is impossible. To pray to God means that you do not depend on yourself or on human calculations, but that you are trustfully looking up to Him of Whom Christ said: "What is impossible with men, is possible with God."

Jesus did not pray at the grave of Lazarus, however.

Jesus thanked God. That is the marvelous word we read.

Lazarus is still dead in the tomb, and now Jesus does not pray that God may grant power to raise him, but He says: "Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest me." The Father had therefore already heard Christ. That means that Jesus

had prayed for the resurrection of Lazarus. While Mary and Martha were in mourning; even while the messenger had been sent to Perea, Christ had already received an answer to His prayer to raise Lazarus from the grave.

That is why Jesus had sent back the message that this illness would not be unto death, but to the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. Christ would not have mentioned this fact under ordinary circumstances, but He now mentions it because of the Jews present, that they might know that the Father always granted Him what He asked, and that they then might believe that the Father had sent Him into the world for the great work of salvation.

"Father, I thank Thee, that Thou heardest me. And I knew that Thou hearest me always."

Is not that a great comfort? To know that we have such an Intercessor who takes our needs to heart just as much as those of Mary and Martha? We, weak creatures, we can thank God only after we have received the importuned blessing. But Christ can thank God for hearing Him before the prayer is granted. He can thank God for the resurrection of Lazarus while he is still in the grave, for Jesus knows that the Father always hears Him, since his prayer is in harmony with the will of God.

What a prospective opens up before us with this message.

It may be that Christ is thanking God for a

sinful wretch who is still sunk in the grave of sin, and who has never yet gone to God with a broken heart. It may be that you have never yet prayed for grace and that Christ has already thanked God for your resurrection from death and doom. Christ is always miles ahead of us. The matter is settled with Him before you are conscious of it. If you are one of those given Him by the Father, He is thanking God while the heavy stone is still lying on your grave of sin. And if Christ may thank God for you, then you will assuredly be saved, for the Father always hears Him. Always,—no matter how hopeless your case may seem. Always,—though all the world may say that you have the brand of doom on your forehead. Always,—without any exception. Take this word of grace as yours though you may deem yourself too great a sinner. Grasp the lifeline that Christ throws out to you, till you hear him say: "Lazarus, come forth!"

* * *

V. This brings us to the *command* that Christ gave to the dead Lazarus.

Jesus turns to the dark tomb, and cries: Lazarus, come forth! This loud call of Christ is not a contrast to the whispered murmurings of the heathen priests of whom Isaiah speaks, but expresses the spiritual exertion of Christ. Christ spoke so loudly because Lazarus' body was already showing signs of decay. Death had already gained supremacy.

Let us consider this for a moment. It gives us a picture of the power of Christ over those dead in sin. We see what means God uses to raise them. It is the power of the Word of God, the Word that lies before us as an open Book.

The world, with all its laughing beauty, is like the valley of dead bones in the vision of Ezekiel. The Lord showed the prophet that Israel would be delivered from Babylon, and He also showed by what means this deliverance would take place: "Prophesy . . . . and say, Hear the word of the Lord!"

This word of the Lord raises a sinner by bringing life into his sinful heart. Only the Word of God does that. No human wisdom or science, no friendly admonitions or advice, not even your sympathy for sinners. God's Word is the only and effective means, for the Spirit that brings life accompanies the preaching of the Word, and no one is able to continually resist that power.

It is indeed true that the Word of God will go over many dry bones which do not stir or move. We sometimes preach for years without seeing a tear of contrition or any yearning for the gospel of reconciliation. That is the cross of the servants of the Lord. God thus keeps them small and humble. He thereby teaches us that our best prepared sermons and most careful preaching are powerless unless He sends His Spirit and makes the general gospel call a personal one by saying: "Lazarus, come forth!"

We, the servants, can but bring the general call. The Lord must come with His special call to open the hearts. But then a sinner can no longer resist. He must obey the great voice of Christ. The breath of life enters the tomb that was full of the stench of death, and the stiffened lips open and begin to praise: "I will sing unto Jehovah as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being!"

When God speaks the dead in sin hear.

You may go further, and also think of the dead who are in the grave at the last day. At the voice of the Son of God they shall arise. His great voice will raise all, the godless and the godly. For the friends of Jesus that terrible day will not be a day of terror, however, but one of joy, when the resurrection of Lazarus will be repeated on an enlarged scale. Think of the reunion between Lazarus and his sisters. Tears of joy. Outstretched hands. Cries of surprise. Above all, thanksgiving to Christ.

Here we must be silent. You yourself will experience it when you see your dear ones again. On the last day Christ calls them one by one: "Lazarus, come forth!" Then you will have them back again, forever, and you will mention their names with thanksgiving. But one name will be heard above them all: "Jesus, Lord Jesus!"

VI. Now we see Lazarus *coming forth* from the grave.

How did he appear to the astonished gaze of those present? You read it in the words: "And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin."

He comes forth as a living human being,—but swathed in grave-clothes.

Is not this a picture of those who were spiritually dead, and were called to life by the prophetic Word of God? The years that lie behind them,—what were they but a life in the grave as far as the spiritual and heavenly things are concerned? Great was the grace of God which delivered them from that existence of death to communion with Christ, to henceforth serve Him. You may call this transition their resurrection. Or their regeneration through the Spirit. Or their inward renewal. All those words bring the same truth that the father in the parable uttered: "This my son was dead and is alive again."

What is the condition of the man who has been resurrected from spiritual death?

Is he at once completely perfect?

Indeed, if you look on him in Christ. Then he is at once called, justified, sanctified, and even glorified. But if you look at him as he is in himself after his spiritual resurrection,—then he is indeed alive in the true sense of that word, but he still retains much that reminds of his former life of

sin, so that he gives the impression of a Lazarus coming from the grave: alive and in grave-clothes. A sinner, saved by grace, does not cut off his past at once. There are still many grave-clothes that hinder the full development of his new life.

You are not at once perfect as by a stroke of magic.

You still have many evil habits that cannot stand before the tribunal of God, even though you yourself do not see their sinful nature. You often cherish sinful desires over which you will later be ashamed though you do not yet deem them to be very evil. You are sometimes in rebellion against the providence of God, instead of submitting to His will and being quiet as a babe at its mother's breast. You may still have to battle with pride, instead of walking humbly before God and man.

Grave-clothes without number.

A living soul, but bound to habits that remind of a sinful past.

You realize that with such a garment you do not fit in the throng of redeemed, who follow Jesus with their faces toward the heavenly Jerusalem. The Lord may bear with your condition for some time. But He does not want you to remain that way. You may learn this from Lazarus. Jesus says to the bystanders: "Loose him, and let him go."

Loose him.

Christ could have removed those grave-clothes with a single word of power, but as He chose

human instruments to remove the stone, He now chooses human instruments to complete His work. He works in the same way with those redeemed from sin. Then He also uses human beings as His co-workers.

We cannot create life in a sinner's heart.

But with the Word of God and our personal love we can help remove the things that check the development of that new life. To loose men and women,—such is the task of preachers, and all others in the Kingdom. Teach the ignorant. Comfort the broken hearted. Cheer the heavy laden. Support the weak. They sometimes doubt whether they are saved because so much of a sinful past remains. Grasp the grave-clothes with loving hands. Loose them, that these burdened souls may rejoice in the liberty of the children of God. Reprove the sin that still besets them, and teach them to confess their sin at the foot of the cross. Pray with them and for them, and then let them go. Let them go through life to the great resurrection day with a song of praise in their hearts:

When I in righteousness at last
Thy glorious face shall see,
When all the weary night is past,
And I awake with Thee
To view the glories that abide,
Then, then shall I be satisfied.

AMEN

THE WIDOW'S SON

A WORD OF COMFORT

I

> And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people.
>
> Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.
>
> And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.
>
> —Luke 7:11-13.

AFTER studying the resurrection of Lazarus, of which John has given such a comprehensive record, we will discuss Luke's briefer story of the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain. This is not the historical sequence in which the resurrections took place; it is not necessary however, to confine ourselves to the order in which these miracles are recorded. We wanted to begin with the resurrection of a full-grown man. Then we wish to consider the resurrection of a young man, and finally we wish to consider the resurrection of a child, the little daughter of Jairus. Thus we see that every age is under the power of death, and also under the power of the Prince of life.

We are now considering the story that is

recorded for us by the physician Luke. It follows as a matter of course that Luke as man of science has recorded many cures given by Christ. Among those healed were seemingly hopeless cases. But such cases interested him exceedingly. He did not take a skeptical attitude towards the miracles of Christ as many doctors in our day without doubt would take. He records all those miracles as wholly reliable, and stamps them with his approval as man of science. We who are believers do not need such corroboration for the miracles, but it can be necessary for some wavering souls to call their attention to the fact that not only miracles of healing, but even a resurrection from the dead, are recorded both on the authority of the Bible and the authority of a doctor who would not take things for granted as might some credulous person.

In this chapter we find the narrative of a sorely tried mother who receives her son back again from death. Much has been written about Jesus and His attitude towards women because He always was kind and sympathetic towards them. This is especially true of Jesus' attitude toward mothers. Whenever He meets mothers there is an almost womanly tenderness in His bearing, and a depth of feeling that never degenerates into sentimental weakness, however, but is always sustained by manly strength. How kind He was to those mothers who brought their babies to Him to bless them! He defended these mothers over against His dis-

ciples when they would send the mothers away. How gently He dealt with the mother of James and John even though her maternal love had well-nigh degenerated into maternal pride. And His bearing towards His own mother was one of both fine dignity and childlike respect and reverence.

And now take the mother in this story! In this narrative Jesus speaks but twice, and that briefly. He speaks a word of comfort to the mother, and a word of power to the son who had died. We will meditate on these words in two discourses. In this sermon we will consider Jesus' word of comfort: "Weep not!"

We will first note the circumstances that led to this word of comfort. Next we will see how necessary this word of comfort was. And finally we will consider its message. It reveals the Christ to us as a Saviour who is moved with compassion for those that mourn.

* * *

I. What were the circumstances that *induced* Jesus to speak this word of comfort?

According to the context our Lord had spent the previous day in the city of Capernaum where He had healed the servant of the centurion. Now we find that He is about a day's journey from Capernaum in the valley of Esdraelon. In this valley lay the lovely village Nain. The name means "green pastures" which tells us that the neighborhood was delightful. The place is called a city by

Luke. In our day it is but a small village where only a few families live. Jesus had gone to this village on foot. But He did not make the journey unaccompanied. Luke tells us that many disciples went with Him, and, in addition, a great multitude. He clearly differentiates between two kinds of followers. The many disciples are those who were attached to Jesus, and in the broad sense of the word believed in Him. But in addition to these adherents of the Christ there was a great multitude of curiosity seekers.

In that day it was even as in ours. Round about the Christ there gathers a group of sincere believers, a group of faithful disciples, who truly believe in Him and have experienced His saving work in their hearts. With this group is found a circle of hangers-on who know of the power of grace only from hearsay, yet are not altogether indifferent to spiritual things.

It is worth noting that Jesus does not send these curiosity seekers away. He lets them accompany Him. One thing was plain to Him, and the church of Christ must ever bear that in mind, namely, that the slightest interest in Christ, even though mixed with mere curiosity, may develop into a living faith. But then you must not send such men and women away. On the contrary, you must try to keep them under the power of truth, for God alone knows whether some of them may not come in this way to the heartfelt confession:

"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life!"

This is the one procession nearing the gates of Nain. It has Jesus in its midst.

But now another procession goes out of the gates of Nain at the very moment that Jesus nears it. It is a funeral cortege with Death in its midst.

A young man is being brought to the grave. He is lying on a bier. This bier had the appearance of an open coffin on a stretcher. We are accustomed to follow the bier or coffin when it is carried to the grave. But in the Orient the mourners would precede the coffin.

You therefore see a grief-stricken mother go out of the gate of Nain. She is weeping. And she is leading this funeral procession on the way to the grave. Just as Jesus was accompanied by a vast throng, so also a vast throng is accompanying her out of the city. These people had not been invited. This great throng has undoubtedly come of its own accord to pay its final respects to the young man who had died, and comfort the mother with their sympathy. Here you have an instance of the spontaneous sympathy that wells up out of the human heart. There is a tremor of pity in the hearts of people when they see a great sorrow as was witnessed at Nain's gate. And indeed, a father or mother are keenly appreciative of the sympathy shown by a group of people who form a circle about the open grave, and have tears of compassion in their eyes. Such spontaneous sym-

pathy is far more comforting than many official calls of condolence.

Try to visualize this meeting at the gate of Nain.

Out of the city comes the king of terrors with his prey, a young man on a bier. And there he meets another retinue having in its midst the Prince of life, who is come into the world to conquer sin and death, and rob the king of terrors of his prey. Two mighty leaders engage in combat. They do not avoid each other. They shall try their strength. Jesus encounters Death, breaks his power, and commands him to release his prisoner.

Do you realize what this encounter pictures?

What is the path of human kind throughout the ages? It is a path to the grave. We are ever carrying forth our dead, day after day, year after year, without any pause. Human kind is a vast funeral procession burying its dead. We are pall bearers, all of us together, and each one of us in turn. We are unceasingly carrying to the grave our fathers and mothers, our sons and daughters. Each one of us in turn is walking to the grave with sorrow in our hearts as this weeping widow at the head of the mourners from Nain.

But who is this that cometh towards us on this path of death?

Lord Jesus! . . . . Thou! Thou who hast died to reconcile the sin of the world, but who art now

the Living One, and standeth in the midst of the church as the Resurrection and the Life!

This Christ breaks the power of death for human kind. He brings life in the hearts, He brings life in the homes, He brings life in the world, and He shall bring life, resurrection life, eternal life in the graves. If you by grace believe in Him you will leave the somber throng that has Death in its midst, and you will enter the retinue of Him who says, "I live, and ye shall live!"

* * *

II. The circumstances which led Jesus to speak his word of comfort: "Fear not" have now been considered. Let us in the second place call your attention to the crying NEED for this word of comfort. We have but to cast a glance at our text. It tells us in sober, yet eloquent words of the heavy loss that this mother had suffered.

Who is she bearing to the grave in the company of this great throng?

It is her only begotten son. And what enhances her grief is that she is a widow.

These few words reveal a world of grief.

It was a sore trial to be a widow. A woman who has borne her husband to the grave has lost her earthly support. The magnitude of this loss is evident from the special promise that God gives to these bereaved ones. He declares that He is the Judge of the widows, and the Father of the fatherless. Any widow who puts her trust in the

Lord will never be ashamed. Never has such a bereaved woman been forsaken of God. There are numerous examples of such widows, who, even though they were left behind with a flock of children, were blessed by God in a marvellous and unexpected way. God smooths their path. He strengthens them with His grace in their hearts. He is their strong defense.

The widow of Nain had but one son.

He was still a youth, and promised to be her support in her widowhood and in her old age. Who can estimate the joyous expectations that filled her heart as her son grew up. But God's plans are often wholly different from our plans. He destroys the bright hopes of this widow by taking away her son's life. O, how strange and incomprehensible are the deeds of our God! The natural order is that the children bury their parents. But here a mother, who is a widow, must bury her child. What a world of woe!

And then we read that he is her only son. After him no one remains. She can not transfer her love for him to some other children. When she by and by returns from the cemetery no other child's voice will whisper in her ear: "Mother, we are still here!" No. This widow does not have even that comfort. She must now tread her path through life in loneliness. Her name and her family, which her son would have carried on, will be erased from the family registers in Israel.

And if she had but a husband to whom she

could express her grief. But she is a widow, and is now also childless.

When you think of this great sorrow you are not surprised that a large throng is following the bier. The more so, since the son of this widow was a youth.

Our human hearts are somewhat easier reconciled to death when it takes away the grey haired men and women. The aged have a full and rich life behind them, and if their life has been a walk with God their last step is a step into glory. But when a young man is called by death it seems so unnatural to us. He has hardly taken a few steps on life's path. His work is just begun. He cherishes all kinds of ideals in his mind and heart. He dreams of a golden future. And then to be suddenly cut off as a flower of the field,—that is doubly painful for himself and for those who remain behind.

But shall we murmur about God's sovereign pleasure?

Our young men will do better by taking the facts as they are.

There are trees that gradually decay and finally fall. There are also trees in the forest of humanity that are cut off at God's command while their wood is still green and the limbs are heavy with blossoms. Let our young men remember that their strength and beauty are no security against death. By this gospel story God warns them not to waste these precious years which fly away, and of which

each day may be the last, in the service of Satan. Our life is brief and insecure. Seek therefore in your youth the things that belong to your peace. The days of your youth are the most beautiful and rich when you have Jesus as your Saviour and bow your neck under His yoke. His service never brings regret. He who follows the Lamb whithersoever It goeth shall indeed find that his body weakens with the passing years, but as far as his inward life is concerned he will remain a vigorous youth to life's very end.

When this end of your life comes, sooner or later, and you are borne to the grave as one who belonged to Jesus Christ,—why be afraid? Great will be the sorrow of a mother who follows the coffin. There will probably be a great throng which in spontaneous sympathy accompanies your bereaved parents to the cemetery. But the cutting pain and sorrow are sanctified by the conviction that you have entered the joy of the Lord. That gives a gleam of light in the darkness, and at the somber grave people will say: "This is the gate of heaven!"

* * *

III. And what, finally, was the *meaning* of this word of comfort that Jesus spoke?

We read in our text: "And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not."

We are grateful for this statement of Luke. It tells us what caused Jesus to speak these seem-

ingly unfitting words: "Weep not." Our Saviour was never unhumanly hard and cruel. He does not disapprove of the tears shed over an only son who has died. Such tears are holy in His sight. He Himself also wept at the grave of Lazarus. And He knows that tears bring relief to a broken heart.

Jesus' comforting word comes forth from an inward compassion for this brokenhearted mother. You do not read that He was moved with compassion for the young man who had died, but for the grief-stricken mother. The mother is the main person in this narrative. Though He now sees her for the first time, and she seems to have but a superficial knowledge of Him, her sorrow stirs His soul. He shall dry her tears by giving back her son to her again. And this purpose lies back of the comforting words: "Weep not!"

You must not raise the objection that this widow had not asked Jesus to restore her son to life, and that the Lord would usually work His miracles only in answer to prayer. You that speak thus have never fathomed the depths of Divine pity. The Lord not only answers spoken prayers, He just as frequently gives an answer to your unexpressed needs, needs which you are not able to bring in words. How often does He not bless you unasked? You have both your hands full of temporal and spiritual blessings, but how many of them have not been given you without any prayer on your part? Ever and again the Lord answers

before you pray and surprises you with His gifts, which you do indeed need, but for which you had never sought His face.

Your needs are so many prayers to God.

And would Jesus,—He is purposely called Lord here, for He is God above all to be praised,—would Jesus not have noticed the unspoken needs of this bereaved mother? He knew what was taking place in her heart. Later, while bleeding on the cross, He would remember the needs of his own mother and give her unasked another son in His beloved disciple John. Thus the widow of Nain, with her broken heart and her tear-stained face, was a touching prayer to Jesus because of her great need. He read in her bent form the supplicating cry: " My son! My son! O, God in heaven, remember me in my loneliness! My son! My son!"

His inward compassion urges Him to take away this bitter grief by restoring this son to his mother again. Therefore He says to her: "Weep not." He stirs hope in her heart. For who would say anything like that in the presence of a coffin unless deliverance could be given? Will she lift up her face to Him in hope, when she has nothing more than this word of the Lord? Will she believe this one word full of joy bringing promises?

It all depends on her faith, for only when faith is present can Christ work His miracles. And the results have proved that faith was indeed found in her heart. She received her son back again. But then she must have felt that this blessing was

given her from pure pity, for she herself had never dared to ask it.

The Lord ever deals with us in Divine pity.

He supplies all our wants from free grace. He simply asks us to believe in His word when He says to us: "Weep not." He brings this message to us in the gospel when our faces are bathed in tears over the miseries of life, especially the misery of our own heart. Life is full of bitterness. Even as the widow of Nain we must bury much that is dear to us: blasted hopes, unfulfilled dreams. We must daily bury many things, to say nothing of our dear ones, and this is not possible without trials and tears. But our bitterest tears are those which we weep before God because of our sin and guilt, and the corruption of our own heart. Blessed are we, if we have learned to weep over our sins as over an only son. Then the Lord comes to us with His marvellous mercy. He comes with His, "Weep not," for He has paid for all our sins, and He creates in us a pure heart through His Holy Spirit. If you will but believe this word of the Lord He will restore to you again all that you have lost: your lost innocence, peace, light and salvation, and at the end of time even a lost paradise.

AMEN

II

A WORD OF POWER

> And he came and touched the bier; and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.
>
> And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.
>
> And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people.
>
> And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judea, and throughout all the region round about.
>
> —Luke 7:14-17.

WE would meditate again on the story of the widow's son of Nain.

We have already spoken on the first verses of this story, and now wish to consider the second part.

You remember what had taken place. Accompanied by a large throng of people Jesus had met another throng coming from the village of Nain. Death and Life there met each other, and it was to be expected that He who is the Resurrection and the Life would gain the victory over Death, and that the story would end with the resurrection of this widow's son.

It is a touching story.

You can find a picture in it, however, of the

complete redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ. He gives help to the bereaved mother in her distress. He does this unasked, simply because He was inwardly moved with compassion over her misery. And therefore we ask: Is not this on a small scale what Jesus has done to deliver us from the misery in which sin has brought us all? The Son of God has not come down from the heavens of glory to deliver us from sin, death and hell because we have beseeched Him on our knees, but because He was moved with inward compassion over us. The impulse came from Him, not from us. Divine compassion, Divine sympathy for those who were in the fetters of death moved Him to the bloody struggle for our salvation.

That heaven-wide compassion is revealed in the words: "Weep not." These words come to all who sigh, weep, and mourn on account of the woe that sin has brought into the world. And as the tears of this widow were wiped away, so also we have a prophecy that God's Divine compassion shall one day remove all pain and death, just as Christ lifted up the widow of Nain from out the depths when He said to her dead son: "Young man, I say unto thee, arise!"

If we wish to know the full significance of this word of our Lord we must first consider what this word of miraculous power meant for the bereaved widow; then we will see what a glorious perspective this miracle unrolls before our eyes; and fin-

ally what blessed results the miracle had for those present that day, and should have for us.

* * *

What was the *first purpose* of these words of Christ?

We need not guess it. The story of Luke is so plain that but little explanation is necessary. We have seen on a former occasion that the funeral cortege, as it came out of the gate of the city, met Jesus, surrounded by a vast throng of people. He came to the bier, and spoke a word of comfort to the sorrowing mother. Now He will speak a word of power which will explain the word of comfort. He shall prove to this despairing mother, by raising her son, that her tears were unnecessary. Luke describes the event when he writes: "And He came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And He said: Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother."

Jesus therefore turned from the mother to the son. He approached the bier on which the son lay. The bier was like an open coffin. The young man lay within wrapped in linen clothing, with his face upward. Now Jesus touches the bier, and the pall bearers stand still.

According to the law of Moses any one who touched a dead body would become defiled. That does not prove, however, that anyone who touched a bier would also become defiled. We need not

therefore dwell on the otherwise beautiful idea of some expositors of the Bible who point out that Christ could no more be polluted by death than He could be polluted by sin which brought death into the world. That is indeed a blessed truth. Christ is indeed as the sun which sheds its light on the most leprous of men without becoming the least polluted. Christ remains holy and pure even though He comes into contact with the most odious sinners. But that truth is not taught here. Jesus went to the bier and touched it for a wholly different purpose.

For the words immediately following, read: "and the bearers stood still." Jesus must have given them some gesture to halt. For the custom among the Jews was the very opposite of ours. They carried their dead with rapid steps to the grave, while we proceed slowly, and walk with measured tread on the cemetery when we follow a coffin. It was therefore unusual for the pall bearers to stop their swift pace at the behest of Christ and stand still. Death, in its somber majesty, rules these pall bearers for the time being. But they realize instinctively that a higher majesty now commands them in the person of Jesus Christ. They bow before His august sway. They recognize His authority and power. "The bearers stood still."

And then Jesus touches the bier. He lays His hand on the crude coffin. He demands the surrender of that corpse to Him. He claims the young

man who is being carried to the grave. It is the gesture of the Conqueror of death and the grave who quietly repulses the king of terrors, and shall now deprive him of his prey. Jesus need not speak a word to the pall bearers. They silently obey. A shudder of awe must have gone through the throngs that crowded the bier on both sides. And in the hush that ever comes over a crowd in a moment of great stress, Jesus speaks with authority to the corpse on the bier, and says, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!"

That word was sufficient. It was the word of the King of kings.

An Elijah must engage in a bitter struggle with death and stretch himself three times over a dead child before he can restore the breath of life; the prophet was but a servant and could not come with a simple command, but Christ is King, and where the command of the King comes there is royal authority. One word from His mouth, and the young man sits up and begins to talk. The word of the Lord is always a creative word which calls the things that are not, as though they were. Both after soul and body the young man is restored to life. He is restored to life as far as his body is concerned, for he rises from the bier by his own strength. He needs no helping hand to raise him and remove the grave clothing. And his spirit is also restored, for he begins to speak. His mind is clear. His mind is not beclouded, or confused, as of a person who wakes up from a stupor. He has

complete control of his mind and his thoughts, and can express them in words.

"And He gave him to his mother!" With that beautiful picture the story ends.

Death breaks the tie between mother and child, but Jesus reunites them again. He does not want this young man to remain with Him, and follow Him everywhere. No, He had been moved with Divine compassion for this mother. She must have her support for her old age back again. Jesus knows what she needs. "And He gave him to his mother!"

* * *

II. Let us now see what a beautiful perspective our text opens for us.

The miracles of our Saviour are called "signs" in the Bible. They are signs of the higher order of existence, which shall replace the chaos of sin, in the Kingdom of glory. In these wonders or signs the light of future glory breaks for a moment into our present drab existence. So we find in the resurrection of the young man of Nain a *striking* image of the resurrection of the dead on the last day.

We have referred to this in the story of Lazarus.

In this story we find a few details, however, which give us some idea of the character of the great resurrection.

We find at once a rich comfort against the fear of death in the fact that the resurrection will take

place in a moment of time, at the command of Christ, as we find it here in our text.

Death seems to take possession of a person completely and for all time. It seems utter folly to imagine that anyone would become alive again after he has once paid his debt to nature and has gone the way of all flesh. If once we have borne away our dead they seem to have been taken from us forever. Any return from that bourne seems impossible, unless you have learned to live by faith. And, indeed, our human hearts complain that there is no power against death. Death lets no beauty, no youth, no science, no gold, and no prayers check him in his destructive work.

Is dead indeed such an autocrat?

Read this resurrection story again and you will receive a new view on death. Death lays us down in sleep. He stretches us out on our last couch to rest,—that is all. And that sleep is not a deep sleep. It takes but a single word of Christ to awake you from that sleep. No rumbling earthquakes or great upheavals are necessary. Only His voice: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!"

At this single word you will arise without effort, just as this young man arose from his bier. You will have heard the voice of your Saviour, and to hear is to obey; you need no outside help for you will arise unto eternal life in full consciousness just as this young man did not arise half dreaming, but fully conscious, and able to speak clearly.

This is significant for the message of the resurrection.

In that new world there will be a people who have death and the grave forever behind their backs. And you must not fear that that new world will be filled with specters who will glide past each other in eternal silence. You will not be in a world of silent shadows, but in a world where there are words, voices, thoughts, uttered by yourself and others. The young man began to speak.

You would not desire the resurrection of the body if you were doomed to a silent and specter-like existence. You have been created for fellowship with others. You feel the need of expressing your inmost thoughts in words, and if in eternity there were no exchange of ideas you would be lonely among the millions of redeemed.

We are going to a world where men will converse; where we can reveal our thoughts, and have a spiritual fellowship far exceeding any in this world with its many misunderstandings.

You will speak with the saints, with Christ, and to God.

You will have a voice to pray, to bless, to sing, to praise, and above all to adore Him who sitteth on the throne and the Lamb. You will never have to search for words to express your inmost thoughts. And in that world of many voices there will be sweet accord since the discord of sin is forever removed.

There is still one more characteristic of the

resurrection life to which we wish to call your attention.

We read of the young man that he arose, and began to speak; and we read of Jesus: "And He gave him to his mother."

There is not a single mother who is not touched by these words, if she is mourning a departed son or daughter.

Our children are part of ourselves, part of our hearts, probably the best part of our hearts. Has God given them to us to deprive us of them forever? Must our last words at the coffin of our children be: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away"? No, truly not. You may say with a full, clear voice: "Blessed be the Name of the Lord!" You may say this not only in submission to His incomprehensible counsel, but also as you think of the future. If your dear ones have fallen asleep in Christ you will receive them out of His hand again: the widow her son, the husband his wife, the brothers their sisters, and all who were united to them with ties of blood and of faith. The separation is temporal, the reunion is eternal. And you will receive them not in a humiliated, but in a glorified body. Mothers! What shall it be, *what* joy, when these words will also be fulfilled for you: "And He gave him to his mother!"

* * *

III. The resurrection of the widow's son was not without results. We may even say that the results were great. The miracle made a deep

impression on the throng that came from Nain, and also on the throng that was following Jesus. For we read, "And fear took hold on all: and they glorified God, saying, A great prophet is arisen among us: and, God hath visited His people. And this report went forth concerning Him in the whole of Judea, and all the region round about."

The first impression was therefore one of holy fear. The throngs felt themselves to be in the presence of the supernatural. They recognized in the miracle a revelation of God. And any one who comes into contact with the things Divine is always filled with fear. Then we realize that we are sinful and that God is holy, and that no sinner can stand before Him. This awe for the majesty of God, which was revealed in the resurrection of this young man, caused the bystanders to praise God.

They not only praise the name of the Lord, but acknowledge that the Christ who had wrought this miracle was a great prophet, and that God had visited His people. Of course, this conviction was only partly correct. The people recognize in Jesus a prophet of the Lord, even such a prophet as might usher in the coming of the promised Messiah, but they do not recognize Jesus as the prophet, the great prophet spoken of by Moses, whom God had promised to His people. Jesus might be the forerunner of the Christ, but was not the Christ Himself, according to their minds. They express their faith by saying that the day of

salvation is at hand, but they are still blind for the truth that this was not a passing visit of God to His people, but was the one great visit of which Zachariah had sung when he praised the Lord for the tender mercies of God whereby the dayspring from on high had visited them.

Yet the miracle had results, lasting results.

Where so great a multitude had seen this miracle it is not surprising that the rumour of Christ went over the whole land, and even over the borders. This report has also come to us. We know Jesus better than the inhabitants of Nain. For we know that He is able to raise them that are spiritually dead, just as He raised the young man from the bier, and gave him to his mother. And this is indeed the richest result of the power of Jesus Christ, that we have been raised up from our natural state of sin to fellowship with the Lord in a new and eternal life. "Young man, I say unto thee, arise!"

Many have not yet listened to this call of Christ.

Indifferent and careless about heaven and God they live year after year hardly realizing that they have death in their hearts. Among men and women of every lifetime you find those that are spiritually dead. Greyheaded men and women who are nearing the grave and have but little time to spare. Men and women in the very prime of their lives, but who have choked all higher instincts with the cares of this world. Indeed, they are often

respectable citizens in their community. When they are called by death a great throng follows them to the grave just as in Nain. Probably the whole city mourns their loss. But how great their social position may have been, and how many the voices to which they listened in their lifetime, they have never listened to the appealing voice of Christ. They die as they have lived, without Christ.

Our text comes with a special message to young men and women, however. In our day they are very prominent, while an older and wiser generation is placed in the background. How much is not being done in our day for our young men and women? We are uneasy because of the apostasy that is taking place in Christendom, and which is working havoc among our youth. And then we rejoice that in our day also there are still many young men and women who hunger and thirst for the gospel. Many conferences are called where experts discuss the needs of our youth. And if in these conferences all is not gold that glitters, we still rejoice that there are so many who enquire for the way of life, and often find it.

There are among our young men and women many, however, who still need that mighty word of the Lord: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." At their age they are in unusual danger. Their youthful hearts are easily led astray, and they have but little power to resist. Often sin comes to them in the beautiful garment of an angel of light, and

before they know it, they are hopelessly entangled in evil. Many a mother has a broken heart because she mourns the downfall of a promising son. It would be less bitter for her to stand at the coffin of her child, as the widow of Nain, than to see him sink in sensuality and godlessness. Not only his life, but also her life is ruined. She must bear him away. She has borne him away years ago from the city where men live unto God. Her life has become a path to the grave.

Mother, there is yet hope for your son!

He can not have sunk so deeply in sin, misery and death, but the Christ can come to him as He came at the gate of Nain. Then He will speak His word of comfort to you, mother, and say, "Weep not!" And then He will speak His word of power to your son dead in sin. See! He touches the bier! The pall bearers stand still! Something momentous is at hand! Jesus Christ lays His hand on the bier because He claims that youth, and declares that this youth is His possession. Then He speaks to him who is dead in sin with a voice that creates eternal life when He commands: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!"

See! The young man arises and sits upright.

And even as the young man of Nain he begins to speak.

His words are the words of a broken heart: "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight, O Lord!"

His words are the language of a broken heart.

His words are the cry for grace.

His words are prayer, praise, thanksgiving and adoration: "Unto me the chief of sinners, is this grace given!"

But even this is not the end of the story. The Lord puts a crown of joy on His work of redemption. He gives this son back to his mother again. Now she is blessed indeed. Her son is born to her a second time. When he was first born to her it was but for this present time. Now he is born to her for eternity. And methinks, I see on the bier arms outstretched; I hear a voice quivering with tears and joy, saying: "Mother, mother, loving mother!"

We turn our faces away from that touching scene.

We have been the witnesses of God's greatest grace.

When we went out of the city we formed a funeral cortege, but we return with festivity. We cast aside our mourning garments and enter the city, our mouths filled with rejoicing. See! A mother is preceding us. But now she is not weeping in despair. Her tears are tears of joy. As she weeps she praises God, and says, "This my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found!"

AMEN

THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS

THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS

> And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, (I say unto thee,) arise.
>
> —Mark 5:41.

WHILE Jesus dwelt among us He not only raised up the man Lazarus, and the youth of Nain, but also a child of twelve years. The first three Evangelists unanimously describe this miracle though they differ in some details.

According to Matthew the chief of the synagogue himself told Jesus that his little daughter had just died. But Mark and Luke report him as saying that his child was sick, while the servants later bring report of the child's death. Various explanations have been made of Matthew's version of this miracle. Some think that Jairus left his child when he had given up all hope of recovery, and that he was convinced that his little girl had died when he had come to Jesus and therefore tells of her departure. This explanation of the difficulty is hardly satisfactory. It seems to us that it can be explained more simply. Matthew tells the whole story in a very brief way, in just a few verses. He seems to have combined the child's last hour of agony with her death, since he did not wish to dwell on the details, but on the resurrection itself.

However this may be, we have three sacred writers describing this miracle for us to bring this unusual deed of the Lord to our attention.

In the story of the youth from Nain we saw a mother mourning the loss of an only son who was her pride, and the support of her life. By contrast we have here a father who is pleading for the life of a dear daughter on whom the shadow of death has fallen. Both father and mother are pictured true to life. The different characters of man and woman are plainly seen. The mother gives free expression of her grief in a flood of tears. The father so restrains his grief that he can exert himself to the utmost to save his child. This may account for the fact that the grief-stricken mother is given aid by Jesus unasked, while the father must plead for help.

Christ does not help and save people according to one unchangeable method. He comes in various ways to us with His grace. If there be but a little spark of faith in your heart, He stands ready to help you in all your trouble. You notice this in the case of Jairus, who must implicitly trust the power of our Lord's grace. As we read this story we find a *prayer* of faith, a *trial* of faith, a *strengthening* of faith, and then we see faith *rewarded* by the care and power of Christ.

May the Lord give us similar encouragement by saying to us in this sermon: "Fear not, only believe!"

I. Let us first listen to the *prayer* of faith uttered by the ruler of the synagog.

Mark calls him Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagog. The synagog was the house of prayer for the Jews, where they would assemble for worship, to read and meditate on the Word of God. One of those present would be asked to give a word of exposition. Jesus Himself had often spoken in the synagog at Capernaum, the city at the sea of Tiberius, where this miracle took place. Some sort of a consistory managed the affairs of the synagog. The consistory chose a presiding officer from its own members. Jairus occupied this honorable office. He was therefore a leading citizen, and was acquainted with Jesus through His preaching in the synagog, and the miraculous works which were published abroad.

This aristocratic ruler is griefstricken.

He has a daughter twelve years of age. Luke tells us that she was his only child. His life was completely bound up in his only child. She was not only a charming little girl, but was already developing into the beauty of maidenhood, since this begins in the Orient at her early age. She stood on the threshold of a new, beautiful life, which she filled with fantastic fancies.

But God sometimes cancels our fondest hopes. The smiling child became ill. Mark does not picture the agonies of the parental hearts as they see their darling writhing in the grip of death. He simply lets us know that in that hour of agony one

Name comes before the mind of Jairus as a sunbeam will sometimes break through dark clouds. It is the name of Jesus. *He* may be able to help and save.

Jairus at once runs to the seashore where Jesus has just landed from the country of the Gadarenes. In little or no time this fine aristocrat is lying as a suppliant at Jesus' feet, and prays earnestly, saying: "My little daughter is at the point of death: I pray thee, that thou come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be made whole, and live!"

She shall live! It is the triumphant testimony of faith!

We cannot doubt it. There was faith in the heart of Jairus, even though it does not reveal itself here as saving faith. Saving faith flees to Christ with the prayer for grace to deliver from sin and guilt. The ruler flees to Christ for deliverance for his child. Yet it was faith, even such a faith that Jairus confesses: "Lord Jesus, Thou whom many only recognize as a rabbi, Thou hast power over life and death. Thou canst do what only God in heaven can do. Come into my home. Lay Thy hand on my daughter, and a Divine miracle will take place. She shall live!"

It is a faith that we envy.

And yet it was far from perfect.

The centurion of Capernaum stood higher than the ruler of the synagog. Jairus deems it necessary that Jesus comes into his home and lays His

hand on the child, while the centurion trusted that Jesus could heal his servant from afar. He did not think that it was necessary for Jesus to lay His hand on the sick servant. A single word of command would suffice: "Speak but a word, and my servant shall live!" But with both men faith was sincere, and that is the main thing. Let it be true that the faith of the ruler was mixed with error, it did not keep him from coming to Jesus with the sorrows of his home, and tell of his distress, and be assured that Christ would bring deliverance.

Every troubled soul may learn this from Jairus.

The first and best thing you can do is to kneel before Christ and pray, pray earnestly for grace for your guilty soul. If you can do this in unflinching faith that He can and will help you because He has shed His blood for the remission of sins, then you will be able to come to Him with all the troubles of your life. Then, if your child is sick, you can bring it to Him in prayer. Do not talk overmuch with others about your darling who is the light of your eyes. Rather tell the Lord. Tell Him in all details. Prayer brings relief. It is always dark in a sick room where earnest prayer is lacking. Prayer brings light and joy. No physician can bring that. Neither can the sympathy of your friends. Not even the comforting words of your own husband or wife. Only our Lord can. The help you ask may not be granted at once, but the Helper Himself comes at once with His light

in your soul. It will be as with Jairus. His daughter remained sick for the time being. She even died. But Jesus Himself arose at once at Jairus' prayer and went with him. Jairus could go to his home encouraged since Jesus, the Prince of Life, was at his side!

* * *

II. But now we see that the faith of Jairus is sorely *tried.*

The way of faith is not a smooth path as a rule. We must contend with all kinds of difficulties. It takes special grace ever to proceed in firm trust, and never to doubt God's power and mercy. Of course, Jairus was grateful that Jesus at once went with him to Capernaum. But why did Jesus not utter a single word? Might not the grief-stricken father expect that Jesus would give him a word of comfort and encouragement? If He would but tell him that his daughter would be saved! But Jesus walks next to him in silence. And this silence brings doubt to his heart. What must he think? How anxious he becomes! If he had but the smallest positive promise! But there is nothing, nothing but an alarming silence!

Jesus knew what that father needed. His faith must grow. It was weak, and Christ wishes to make it strong. A definite promise would have been like throwing a life belt to an untrained swimmer. He snatches at the belt, but then neglects to strike out his arms and swim. So Jairus

would have neglected to exercise his faith, if Jesus had given him a definite promise. The man who is always supported remains weak. It is the part of love and wisdom to let him well nigh sink. This father must develop, and live from, the faith he already possesses.

But that is not his only trial.

The faith of the ruler is still more tried by the delay on the road. A great crowd was following Jesus and Jairus. When you remember how narrow the streets in Palestine are, you are not surprised to read of the crush of the crowd. The pressure of the people was so great that when the woman of whom we read here touched Jesus, and He asked: "Who touched my garments?" the disciples say, "Thou seest the multitude thronging thee." It must have been a painful experience for Jairus to be held back by the crowd. Jesus had gone with him, but now the way is blocked by the throng. The heart of Jairus naturally sped towards his sick child to whom he was leading the great *Helper,* and now they can scarcely make any headway. This delay also sorely tried the faith of Jairus.

Yet Jesus makes his trial still more severe. He makes no effort to force His way through the crowd. On the contrary,—when a woman who has been sick twelve years touches His garment with her fingertips, He stands still and investigates who has derived healing power from Him. He calmly lets the anxious father wait as if there

were no dying daughter at home. He seems to forget completely that there is no time to be lost, if he shall not come too late. He quietly converses with the sick woman, though the very ground is burning beneath the feet of the anxious father.

You realize how the faith of the ruler was tried by these experiences. He did not bother about any personal humiliation. That he, a leading citizen, must wait for an unknown woman, is of minor importance. But that dear, dying child for whom he has pleaded on his knees,—how is it possible that the Lord is so slow in giving aid, and even postpones what cannot bear postponement!

Our faith is often too impatient.

When we are in trouble, and see no deliverance anywhere, and then fall before the Lord to place our needs before Him and ask His help, we think that such help must be given at once, and we can bear no delay. But God's thoughts are other than our thoughts. The Lord sometimes let us wait, and seems to remember others only, and forget us. Jairus would have taken Jesus by the hand, if that had not been too irreverent, and hurried Him through the crowd, and pushed that poor woman aside, at least for the time being. In like manner we would force the answer to our prayers from heaven, but the Lord delays to come with His help. He lets others precede us to teach us the important lesson: "They that believe will not haste!" God never hurries. "Yes," answers our anxious heart, Jairus-like, "but the child will die. The need will

become so great that deliverance is impossible. The Lord must hurry or He will be too late." But the unchangeable answer remains: God has no haste, for He is ever greater than our needs. He can heal a sick child, but what would hinder Him from raising a dead child?

Patience, patience! They who believe will *not* make haste.

Sometimes the Lord comes speedily to your aid, and then again with slow steps. But forget you? Never! Your time and His do not always coincide, but when His time to work is come, He makes you ashamed of your impatience, for He then gives you much richer blessing than you had asked. Jairus prayed for healing, and he received a resurrection from the dead.

* * *

III. We will now consider the *strengthening* of Jairus' faith.

The throng of people was still a considerable distance from Jairus' home when messengers came, probably sent by his wife, to inform him that his daughter had passed away. These servants not only bring this sad tiding, but also add what seemed almost self-evident since they did not know the power of our Lord's grace: "Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Teacher any further?" Do not blame these men for speaking in this way. According to human thinking there was no deliverance possible after the death of the child. Why should Jairus still further trouble

Jesus? Dead is dead. There is nothing more to hope for.

Such is ever the language of the human heart, is it not?

We limit the Lord's grace and power. There are things that God can do. And there are also things He cannot do. In the home of Jairus was a case in which the Lord was helpless.

You shake your head in disapproval of those servants?

Probably you must begin by chiding yourself. Or do you never limit God's power? In rather small affairs you are convinced that the Lord can help, and you pray fervently. But in serious cases you often doubt God's power. And then, instead of increasing prayer, you stop. Why should you trouble the Lord? That a man who is leprous with sin should yet be converted,—you doubt it. He is too far gone.

That a wretched wedlock can be sanctified by God's grace after more than twenty years have passed, and love and peace enter that home,—that is impossible! You would not dare to lay that matter before the Lord in prayer.

Of course, the faith of Jairus was rudely shocked by these servants.

But Jesus had also heard their discouraging words. He does not reprimand the men, but turns to the father. When He sees that Jairus sinks because these unspiritual servants are measuring God's power with the thumb-rule of man, He takes

the matter firmly in hand. Though He does not give a definite promise even now, He supports him with the words: "Fear not,—only believe!"

Our Lord reads our hearts.

How well He knew Jairus! The ruler had faith in Jesus from the beginning, but it was weak, and mixed with error. Jairus was being tossed between hope and fear. Jesus did not seem to pay any attention. But now, when fear was to conquer, and swallow up both faith and hope, Jesus encourages him with the words: "Fear not, only believe!"

Fear ever paralyzes faith.

You read again and again in the Gospels the chiding words of Jesus: "Why are ye fearful?" He implies that we never can expect too much of God's power and grace. No matter how wide the sweep of your faith may be, you can never come to the limit of God's power and love.

Fear not, only believe.

May God write these words in our hearts by His Spirit.

Fear not, when you must pass through the deep waters of affliction. Fear will destroy you, but faith will give you a path through the stormy sea.

Fear not, but believe, when Satan would say that your sins are too great to be forgiven. Believe that Jesus saves.

Fear not, but believe, when life's pathway ends. Let your faith in the Prince of Life conquer the fear of death. When all else fails He stands at your side, grasps your hand, banishes fear, and

leads you through the valley of shadows to the light of heaven.

* * *

IV. Thus encouraged Jairus comes to his home with Jesus and the disciples. And now Jesus makes His *preparations* to raise the little daughter.

He took with Him Peter, James and John as He entered the home. This was not because of personal preference, but because they were more receptive for the heavenly and spiritual things. For this reason they were with Him on the mount of Transfiguration and in Gethsemane.

If you ask why none of the crowd were allowed in the home, the answer is that Jesus wished to work the coming miracle in quiet. He never cast His pearls before swine. They were too precious to be trodden under foot. Soon He will drive out the hired mourners. So He takes with Him only His three disciples as witnesses of the miracle.

It seems to have been a roomy dwelling. The house was crowded with noisy murmurs. We prefer quiet when death has come. But the Oriental was loud in expressing grief.

Jesus sees the wailing multitude.

They were not relatives or friends, but hired women, weeping and wailing. Matthew tells us that flute-players were also present. Every house of mourning would have such wailing women. Theirs was not a heartfelt grief, but they knew

how to assume an attitude of deep sorrow. They would weep copiously, wail aloud, and beat their breasts, and in this way bring about an atmosphere of mourning. In addition the weird music of the flutes would also deeply move the hearts of the grieving parents. In this way their surroundings harmonized with the parental sorrow.

Jesus tolerates this Oriental custom.

But this custom does not fit in the home of Jairus. Jesus knows that death has gained but a seeming victory. As Prince of Life He will soon defeat death. Therefore He asks: "Why make ye a tumult and weep?" And He follows with the enigmatic words: "The child is not dead, but sleepeth."

Jesus referred to the deep sleep of death. Death is indeed a sleep for the believers from which they will awaken to a higher life on the last day, also as far as their body is concerned. But the wailing women did not grasp the figure. They were authorities on death. They knew very well that the child had died. So they laugh Jesus to scorn, as the infidelity of today laughs in mockery when believers speak at a deathbed of a sleep from which we will soon awake.

Jesus succeeds, however, in driving out the whole crowd of hired mourners and musicians. No one can resist His Majesty. No one even asks whence He has the authority to act as He does. Even the parents silently consent to His authority, and quiet again prevails in the home.

Jesus gives us precious lessons here.

Many of us must stand at the deathbed of a dear child, of a loving father and mother, and it would be unnatural if we were not touched by such a great loss. There is nothing wrong in giving full expression to our grief, instead of choking it down. But we do not hire any mourners. We may dress in black, or put some crepe around the picture of the one who died. We may express our grief. Our feelings have their just demands, and it is not a mark of grace if people try to choke their feelings in hyper-spirituality and haughtily decry all external mourning in the name of faith.

Jesus does not teach that by driving out the wailing women.

What He banishes from the home of the believer is not sorrow, but the unrestrained, passionate sorrow that was expressed by these hired mourners. When you come into a worldly home you can understand the sorrow of despair that such parents have. Then you sometimes hear loud weeping and wailing, sometimes even hopeless shrieks which can only be stopped by narcotics. In death they have lost everything, everything. There is no spark of hope in their hearts, for they do not know Christ as the resurrection and the life. They only know the devouring grave.

This despair might not be found in the home of Jairus, nor in the homes of those who believe in Christ. There is sorrow, deep sorrow, but it is quiet sorrow, sanctified sorrow, that drives out

loud wailing. The disciples of the Lord may not weep as those who have no hope. The worldling may in despair beat his head with his fists, and cry: "Dead, dead, dead!" . . . . the believers, having Jesus at their side, lift up their tear-stained faces to Him, and hear Him say: "The child is not dead,—it sleepeth!"

* * *

V. Let us now listen to the word of *power* that comes from Christ.

Jesus enters the room where the little child lies on her deathbed. It is very still there, as is fitting in that solemn hour when Jesus shall bring the child back from the valley of death. He draws near, conscious that death is for Him but a sleep. He had spoken but a single word to the widow's son, and the young man rose up from the bier. But in a friendly and tender way He extends His hand to the little daughter of Jairus to help her arise, and then He speaks the word of power which Mark has kept for us in the original Aramaic: "Talitha cumi, . . . Little daughter, arise!"

There is power in that word. Not gradually, but at once the spirit returns to the dead child, and she arises as from a refreshing sleep. She walks about, says Mark. Death is gone, sickness is forgotten, and she resumes her life as any active child does when it awakes in the morning.

No wonder you read that her parents were amazed with great amazement. It was the first

resurrection miracle of Jesus. But Jesus recalls them to the sober duties of the day by telling them that they must give her something to eat. It sounds very matter-of-fact. Who thinks of eating and drinking when a dead person has just returned to life? But Jesus not only has an eye for momentous things; He also thinks of little things. He wants the parents to return to their daily task. They would want to proclaim this miracle abroad. And that is just what Jesus does not want. He even forbids them to publish it. Of course, we are not to take this command too literally. They talked of this miracle in their own circle, and so must have expressed their gratitude to Jesus. But the hired mourners are probably still at the door. If the miracle were told now it would be broadcast everywhere. Jesus wishes to avoid public acclaim, for then the people would proclaim Him as an earthly Messiah, a Messiah who wrought miracles according to their fleshly hearts, but not the Messiah who would shed His blood for the salvation of the world. And faith in the true Messiah is the one thing necessary to deliver man from the bands of sin and death.

The disciples and the parents are amazed with great amazement.

But how great must not be our amazement when we see the power of Jesus revealed in the words: "Talitha cumi, ... Little daughter arise!" What a grand perspective unrolled before the eyes of those who were in Jairus' home. There

they saw that Christ brings all believers with Him in His train. They were used, as we are, to what is caled the natural law of life. All men must die sooner or later. Even the children are not spared. That is the natural course of things in the world, though very unnatural for our hearts. But what does nature care for broken hearts! We cannot control our destiny! As an iron law, as an inexorable fate, it is appointed to man sooner or later to die, and where is the power that breaks this law, and gives another law, the law of life eternal, in its place? Do you still ask that question? That marvellous power is in Christ. What happened in the home of Jairus was a break in the normal existence of things, and a projection of a Kingdom in which not death, but life reigns supreme.

We must all die, ... such is the straight line that runs through human kind, and no one can bend that line. But Jesus says, "all who believe in me shall live," . . . . that is the line of life and of glory that Jesus draws right through the line of death. Then the line of death breaks, and Jesus puts the broken pieces aside, to build the Kingdom of life eternal.

The first gleam of this triumph of life over death was seen at the deathbed of a little child. Those present saw the mighty fissure caused by the realm of life into the realm of death. A glorious future dawned here before the eyes of the amazed

onlookers. A future in which no one will say: "We are walking towards the grave," but in which all the redeemed shall jubilantly cry: "We go from strength to strength on the way of life everlasting!"

AMEN

TABITHA-DORCAS

TABITHA—DORCAS

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.

And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner. —Acts 9:36-43.

THE first Christian churches make a profound impression on us with their life and work, an impression that often makes us feel ashamed. Their faith reminds of the fresh water that bub-

bles up out of a spring. There is an energy there that makes us jealous. But what strikes us most is the loving service in which faith expressed itself, and revealed itself to the outside world. Not without cause did Paul call the love that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, the greatest. Paul could write elemental truths. But none is more elemental than the words: "If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, ... I am NOTHING!"

What is a church, what are its elders and deacons, what are its ministers and pastors, who all may be laboring zealously for the welfare of the Lord's flock, if they lack love? . . . . Nothing!

Think of a preacher of renown. A man of influence. A man of great knowledge and therefore a great moral force. A man who speaks fluently, and week after week thrills a vast multitude. But then a man who lacks love, as the plain people soon feel. What is the value of that man when God weighs him in the balance? . . . . Nothing.

But his position and influence then? . . . . Nothing.

And his knowledge and wisdom? . . . . Nothing.

And his ceaseless labor? . . . . Nothing.

And his marvellous pulpit powers? . . . . Nothing.

God looks upon the heart. And if that is

unsound, nothing is sound according to the standard of heaven.

But what is true of a minister is also true of the various members of the church. The commandment of love is for all members in general and has no exceptions. That is why the story of Dorcas has a message for us all. In her life we find loving service exemplified. That loving service must go out from the church to the mass of people who have forgotten God and His Word, to bring back those that are lost.

As we read this story we first read of Tabitha's serving love, then of her death, and then of her resurrection. Let us see what lessons we can draw from this narrative.

* * *

I. We first have here an example of LOVING SERVICE.

Joppa was on the shore of the Mediterranean. Its inhabitants lived mainly from the sea.

The sea can be beautiful. But it can also be cruel. Those who have found a grave in the seas cannot be numbered. In fishing villages are always many widows and orphans.

You could hardly find a larger field for loving service than in Joppa, where the sea continually snatched its victims and many needy widows were found. God had placed a woman there who was a support for its widows and orphans. Luke tells us that her name was Tabitha. This was a Syrian

name which he translates for the benefit of his readers into Greek as Dorcas. It was an appropriate name for this woman. It means gazelle. Some think she received that name because of her beautiful eyes. We prefer the thought that it was given because of her gracefulness and quickness of movement. However this may be, if we are to labor in the service of the Lord, we need quick hands and feet. Where there is hunger and nakedness we cannot take time for lengthy investigation, but should help with the quickness of a roe. For this reason Tabitha was an example of loving service.

What is the SOURCE of loving service?

We find it in our text: "There was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha. . . . This woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did."

Her biography is brief, but full.

It is not accidental that Luke first mentions that she was a disciple, and then mentions her service. Faith was the mainspring of her life. Whether there was an organized church in Joppa or not, Luke does not say. There was a group of believers, and in this group Tabitha was found. Thus God gives each a place. He decrees where we are to live and labor, and fill a place that otherwise would be empty.

A certain disciple,—what a splendid testimony!

Faith in Jesus Christ was the motive power of

her service. We know that there is much philanthropy without personal faith, and which yet spreads a blessing round about. We thank God for it. It is the fruit of His common grace. It draws much that is lovely from human hearts. It is also connected with Christ, for He it is who has brought His spirit of mercy in the world, and something of that mercy gleams in all work of charity, even though the workers do not live personally from faith in Jesus Christ.

If love is to reveal itself in all its fulness, however, it must be the fruit of living faith. Faith unites you to Christ whose heart is moved with pity for all the destitute. Through the mystical bond of faith you receive the Spirit of serving love which filled Christ. He was not come to be served, but to serve, and even give His life for sinners.

And if you are in contact with Christ through a living faith His love will more and more inspire you. This is a serving love which differs in its source and expression from the best philanthropic work. This love can never stoop too low. Her flame is never quenched through disappointment. Her warmth ever cherishes, even when she meets nought but ingratitude. For her no sacrifice is too great. Love is not provoked and takes no account of evil. She ever applies the Scriptural admonition to give our life for the brethren. And then we do not serve complainingly, but gratefully, to the temporal and eternal salvation of our neighbor and the glory of God.

This love is also *spontaneous.*

Tabitha received no official appointment for her work. She was filled with the love of Christ and felt inwardly moved to her task. She was not trained for her work, but gave the helping hand to alleviate poverty and sorrow. As spontaneously as the sun casts its rays into the huts of poverty, she brought her service.

In a service of love the spontaneous is the beautiful.

It may not be lacking in our day.

The times have changed. We have churches and societies which Tabitha lacked. We can send our service through prepared channels. Irrigation! Wherever necessary let us dig ditches through which the waters may flow. Let us distribute wisely. Let us thank God that we can do the work of charity in a systematic way.

The same is true of trained workers.

Possibly even a Tabitha might have done still more fruitful work if she had been trained. It is a blessing to be trained for any work in the Kingdom. Then we can be doubly useful.

But will not our service then lose its spontaneity? Indeed not! That is a matter of the heart. A heart that is filled with the love of Christ is like a fountain spontaneously bringing cheer.

Tabitha was *full* of good works and almsdeeds.

That is another characteristic of loving service. Tabitha was not a dilettant who patters about, but gave herself wholeheartedly to her work

of love. Of course, this cannot be demanded of all disciples. Our daily life has demands that must be met. A married woman finds her great task in her home, and may not neglect that to help her neighbors.

But if we take up any task in God's Kingdom we may not consider it to be some work to pass away the time. God's work is too holy to be but an ornament. It demands the whole man. Clothe the naked, feed the hungry, nurse the sick, distribute Bibles, preach the Gospel,—it is a work not for some idle hours, but demands the motto of Paul: "This ONE thing I do!"

And if our daily task does not allow us to give all our time to the work of charity, that does not matter. Let us give what we give in loving service. Otherwise we are. . . . nothing.

Tabitha's service was also *personal.*

She personally made many garments for the poor. Do not think that was easy. Stitch after stitch, seam after seam. That takes time. But love does not bother about that. It was tiring to sit with bent back sewing all day long. And then the expense! Tabitha seems to have been well-to-do. But even though we are not rich we can aid. We can at least repair some old garments, so that the naked are clothed. Besides, love is bold. It will open closed doors and hearts by its appeal to others for aid for the poor.

Such personal service glorifies all charity. A little love is more beautiful than a large contribu-

tion. We can indeed use the aid of others as we distribute charity, but personal love should never be lacking. Then we will bring the needs of the poor before God in prayer. And what is more personal than prayer?

Such was the life of Tabitha.

Would it not be blessed if her example was followed in the church? Though we are grateful for the work of Christian charity that we find on every hand we know that there are still men and women who are averse to hear of Christian service. There is but one good work, they say, and that is the work of Christ, in which a sinner finds rest for his soul.

That last sentence is indeed blessedly true.

But do not forget that Tabitha would be one of the first to agree to it. She was a "disciple." She believed in Jesus, but her faith was not barren. It abounded in good works, which glorify our Father in heaven who gave the desire and the power to do them.

Little faith . . . . little love.

Much faith . . . . much love.

You may not put asunder what God has joined. Rest through faith in Christ, but let that faith through love be a blessing to others. And the Lord does not forget the deeds of kindness you have shown to others. A cup of cold water, a bite of bread, a visit to the sick, and a half-worn garment given to some poor beggar on a bitter winter day, ... you may have forgotten these little

kindnesses, but Christ has written them in His book of remembrance. And the day is drawing nigh when He shall say to you as you are on His right hand, "I was naked, and ye clothed ME, ... for what you have done to one of the least of my disciples in my name, you have done unto ME!"

* * *

II. Next we read of the DEATH of Tabitha.

In her life Tabitha occupied a large place in the hearts of the widows and orphans. When the remorseless sea had again devoured a husband or father, and poverty and sorrow reigned in a home, the widow and orphans would be cheered by hearing the footsteps of Tabitha approach. They knew that she would spread cheer in the somber home, and they must often have said to one another: "What would we do without Tabitha?"

It came to pass in those days, says Luke, that she became sick and died. It seems to have been some sudden sickness closely followed by death. Luke says nothing of the prayers that were sent heavenward in those anxious days, but without doubt many fervent prayers were sent up for her recovery. God did not seem to answer. But this was also in God's hand. Tabitha had brought comfort to so many homes that God was now to work a miracle in her home.

The body had been washed and laid in an upper room according to the custom of that time. Many would soon come for the funeral and show their

appreciation for the kindness they had experienced.

In the meanwhile the disciples have sent two men to Joppa where Simon Peter tarried. Though we are not sure of it, it is quite likely that they sent for Simon while Dorcas was ill. They may have heard of the healing of Eneas, and hoped that Peter might also heal Dorcas by the power of God. At least, the two men entreat Peter to come without delay, and Peter goes at once. This is a lesson for all pastors. The healthy can wait, if necessary, if there is some urgent task that keeps us busy. But the sick cannot. We must ever be ready to call on the sick, even though we are called at midnight.

If Peter was called while Dorcas was still sick, he came too late to Joppa. It seems that when Peter arrived she was about to be buried, as the upper chamber was filled with people. And on this occasion those present were not hired mourners, but widows, weeping, and showing Peter the garments Tabitha had made. Truly, that was a greater homage than many wreaths and flowers, and a finer monument than one of marble. Even during their lives the Lord rewards his servants and handmaidens for their labor. He gives them quiet and joy in their hearts. But the greatest reward comes at their death. Then there is a circle of thankful men and women who remember their kindness and look with tear-dimmed eye on

the corpse. The loss of Joppa was great, for loving service lay on the bier.

Loving service on the bier.

There is no doubt about it, but that must be said of some churches.

They will sometimes be zealous for sound doctrine. And that is to be praised, for no one may have an easy smile when he sees souls wander on paths that can never lead to the Jerusalem that is above. But we must condemn those who hunger after the message of forgiveness of sins, and do not listen to God's law which says that we must love our neighbor as ourselves.

Human kind is bleeding from a thousand wounds. Nakedness, poverty, hunger, pain and sorrow, and the ravages of disease. Mankind is a procession of crossbearers, and it is amazing that here and there happy laughter is still heard. The number of feeble minded and insane is ever increasing, unless we in our day are able to recognize nervous diseases better than formerly. And then the number of neglected children and neurotics who often owe their hapless condition to the sins of their forbears. All is the result of sin, general and personal, but if we know this, and then calmly fold our hands, and do nothing to alleviate distress, what else can be said of us than that we have placed loving service on the bier!

Is this sentence too harsh?

Listen then to the facts.

We read again and again in our church papers

that help is wanted in our institutions of mercy. And on the home mission fields men are wanted to bring the gospel to those who have been estranged from it, but might be brought back again. There is a constant appeal for workers in the Kingdom.

It means there we are facing a deficit of loving service.

We have many young men who are able to do splendid work in the Kingdom of God, but who labor in other fields. We have talented young women who seem to be willing to take up any task but the work of mercy. Has then the Tabitha spirit completely died out? Must loving service remain on the bier?

* * *

III. But we must now turn to the *resurrection* of Tabitha.

Simon Peter has been the instrument in the hand of the Lord to work this miracle. The disciples at Joppa had sent for Peter. This is a reminder to all members of the church to call their pastor when some member of the family is sick, and not just await his call on the theory that he will hear of the sickness anyway. Peter came at once when asked, but found that Tabitha had died.

Yet there was a bright side to this disappointment. When he enters the upper chamber and sees the weeping widows he notices what a blessing Tabitha had been for many in Joppa. Such facts are usually brought to light at the death of

God's faithful servants. The blessed results of their labor remain hidden for the greater part while they are still alive. This keeps them humble, but it is an encouraging thought that when they have died some sinners will be standing about their coffin who have laid aside the ragged garments of sin and have put on the Lord Jesus Christ as the garment of a new life, because of their loving service.

Peter did not at once know what God's purpose was with this touching death. He feels the need of being alone with the dead body, and of prayer for Divine guidance. While he is praying he receives light from Above and learns God's will. That is the law of the Kingdom of grace. You do not learn to know the will of the Lord with your thinking and planning. There is a more excellent way. In moments of perplexity, and in difficult circumstances, when you cannot see your way clear, then lay your problems before the throne of God with humility of heart. And praying, you will gradually come out of your difficulties, and you will see more and more clearly in what way you must go to be in harmony with God's plan.

We receive our richest revelations on our knees.

When Peter arose from his knees he knew that the Lord would restore Tabitha to the circle of the disciples. In calm assurance he turns to the corpse and says, as if he were talking to a person asleep, and was now to awaken her: "Tabitha, arise!"

This word of command bore the power of the resurrection.

As soon as it is spoken Tabitha returns to this earthly life. It happened in a moment of time. But that does not mean that she at once arose to resume her work of loving service. You rather find here a resurrection in various stages, in which Tabitha herself was partly active, and was partly assisted by Peter.

She opens her eyes,—that was the beginning.

She sits up,—that is the continuance.

Peter gives her his hand and helps her arise from the bier. That was the completion of this great miracle.

Finally, when Tabitha stands on her feet, ready to resume her task of mercy, Peter calls in the saints and widows and presents her to them. Loving service is risen from death.

We do not read that they shouted for joy over the living as they had wept over the dead. Deep joy is speechless. Then you can only look up to heaven from whence the blessing flowed. Your praise is then in silence to God as you lift up your soul.

But we do read of the blessed results which this miracle wrought in Joppa. At the end of the narrative we find: "And it became known throughout all Joppa; and many believed on the Lord." Verily, so it is, and so it ever will be. When the world sees that loving service is risen from its sleep and is zealously seeking the good of

human wretches, many will come to faith in Christ. Faith is indeed through hearing the Word of God, but sometimes faith comes from sight. For loving service, which pours oil and wine in the wounds of human kind, is a searching sermon, without words, on Christ the Consolator.

What is the practical lesson we may take from this miracle?

It teaches us that we need never dispair because loving service has died out in some church and the hearts are no longer beating with love for those who are without spiritual knowledge and bodily clothing. You must never conclude that an unfruitful faith cannot be changed into a faith that works in love.

God can raise the dead Tabitha.

Instead of complaining over the lack of love manifested, you must inquire in what way the dead can be made alive. Peter did not complain, but went on his knees in the secret of that upper chamber.

The prayer of the righteous is of great power.

The spirit of mercy can again awaken.

Loving service will go about again if we will but humble ourselves before God over our loveless hearts and approach the God of mercy in prayer.

Make the cause of the wretched your own before the throne of grace, you men and women of prayer. The office of intercessor is most beautiful. Is it not the glory of Christ that He is our intercessor with the Father? Beseech the Lord that

He raise up the spirit of mercy over our people. And when you place the spiritual and temporal needs of the people before the throne of grace, add your own needs, that at least in your heart the grace of Christ may dwell richly, and may spread abroad as merciful love to those who are without. Then you will have boldness to tell your God that the heart of love has ceased to beat in many; that the eye of love no longer seeks the naked who need clothing for both time and eternity; that the quick feet of love are no longer hurrying aid, and that the hand of love is numb.

In the way of prayer the hard hearts become tender, and the fruits of love will be seen. But be not impatient. What has once died in the bosom of the church is not restored by some magical word. Though the resurrection itself may take but a moment, it will reveal itself but gradually before the eyes of men.

It will be a resurrection in installments.

When the Tabitha of loving service again opens her eyes, and notices the needs of her community, then that will be a prophecy of complete recovery, and the hearts of praying men and women will rise in gratitude to God. That is the first installment.

Then there is great joy when that Tabitha arises, even though she is not as quick as formerly. It tells us that the Lord will continue the work He has begun. That is the second installment.

But then there must be a Peter to take her by the hand and set her on her feet. The men and

women of prayer must not look on with folded arms. They must raise her up and give words of encouragement. They must do the utmost to remove all hesitation from the hearts that have begun to be warm for the cause of loving service. That is the third installment.

Church of Jesus, the Lord alone is able to awaken the moribund love of His people. But He does this in the way of YOUR prayers. And when loving service is again seen in Christendom, the church will regain her influence among the masses. Many will believe in Christ, who now pass the church by. They will believe, when we are a mirror of God, reflecting at least this one virtue: love . . . . for God is love.

AMEN